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THE LIFE AND DRAMATIC WORKS

OF

PRADON

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A RIVAL OF RACINE
PRADON

HIS LIFE
AND
DRAMATIC WORKS



PARIS
LIBRAIRIE ANCIENNE ÉDOUARD CHAMPION
5, QUAI MALAQUAIS

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CHAPTER I

LIFE.

Biographical facts concerning the poet Pradon have been scanty and of slight significance. This is not strange when we consider that there is not a manuscript, a letter, or bit of handwriting of the poet that has come down to us. During his lifetime he was a mark for the satirical scorn of Boileau, whose judgment was repeated by successive compilers of literary history, enriched and enlarged by piquant anecdote and epigram to the discredit of the man and his writings. His name has become, thus, a byword for bad taste, ignorance, and literary ineptitude. Biographers of his time, as well as those of the 18th century, devote to him slight space wherein he is mentioned either as M. Pradon or simply Pradon. With the exception of Guilbert, who in his *Mémoires biographiques et littéraires* has him born at Rouen in 1632 ¹, biographers of his day do not give the date of birth nor is the name Nicolas associated with him ². All agree that he came from Rouen. The frères Parfaict in their *Histoire du Théâtre français* ³ note that neither Titon du Tillet ⁴ nor Nicéron ⁵, from whom they drew their information, have thrown much light

1. Nicéron : *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire des Hommes illustres*, Paris, 1745, XLIII, 371 ; also : *Nouvelle biographie générale* (Didot), XL, 967-8.

2. *Dictionnaire critique de Biographie et d'Histoire*, Paris, 1867, p. 998-999.

3. Vol. XIII, 76-77, Paris, 1748.

4. *Le Parnasse français*, Paris, 1732, pp. 471-472.

5. *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire des Hommes illustres de la République de Lettres*, Paris, 1745, XLIII, 371-397.

upon Pradon's life, but they suggest the possibility of obtaining more definite facts. It remained for Beaurepaire to discover the baptismal record, until then unknown, which advances the date of Pradon's birth to 1644 and shows him not as Nicolas Pradon but Jacques.

In his *Notice sur le Poète Pradon*¹ M. Beaurepaire gives the following biographical facts. He finds that the name Pradon belonged to a South French family and did not appear in the region of Rouen before the middle of the 16th century. At Rouen there were three branches springing from a common source. The first member of this family to acquire prominence was a certain Jean Pradon who in 1607 was « procureur du Roi en la vicomté de Rouen »². His son, Louis, « avocat au parlement », became likewise « procureur »³. To this branch belong a Louis Pradon mentioned November 21st, 1636, as « religieux du prieuré de Beaulieu » and his brother Georges Pradon of the parish of Notre-Dame-de-la-Ronde, both « nobles hommes ». This Georges married on February 22nd, 1631, Anne de Cahaigne and appears for some reason to have gone to the island of Guadeloupe where he died in 1639, leaving in France his widow and a daughter Marguerite⁴. There is a record of the 21st of November, 1639, wherein Geuffroy Le Maistre, Marin Le Tellier, and Jean de Cahaigne, citizens of Rouen, together with Pierre Gommet, Pierre Dieppedalle and Anne de Cahaigne, « veuve de feu Georges Pradon », all interested in a building constructed by the late Georges Pradon in Guadeloupe, delegate Toussaint Belenger, a tanner of Rouen, to go to Guadeloupe and take possession for them of this building⁵. During his lifetime it is noted that Georges had a lawsuit with the widow of a

1. Charles de Beaurepaire : *Notice sur le Poète Pradon*, Rouen, imprimerie Cagniard, 1899.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 14, note.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 15, note.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 15, note.

certain Louis Pradon, sieur d'Esnaville, May 4th, 1637 ¹.

To the second branch of the family belongs this Louis Pradon, sieur d'Esnaville, whose widow is mentioned above as contesting at law with Georges Pradon. The sieur d'Esnaville was in 1609 « conseiller-auditeur » at the Chambre des Comptes and died in 1636 leaving a widow, Barbe Le Roux, and among other children Jacob Pradon, the eldest, who became in 1636 seigneur du Tuit-Anger and later « lieutenant-général à la Table de Marbre du Palais » at Rouen ².

The third branch is represented by Jean Pradon of Rouen, « huissier aux Requêtes » in September 17th, 1592, later transferred to Caen, 1596. The *Tablettes de Rouen* mention a Jean Pradon, « bourgeois de Rouen, propriétaire des droits attribués à l'office de premier commissaire des Tailles des paroisses de Guiseniers, Arquency et Travaillies, supprimés par édit de février 1634, 12 juillet 1636 » ³. Jean Pradon married a Marie de Blossenville. Their son Jacques was received « avocat au parlement de Normandie » on May 27th, 1631. This man was the father of our poet ⁴.

On January 7th, 1635 Jacques married Marguerite Delastre, daughter and heiress of the late Charles Delastre, lawyer and « greffier de l'officialité » of Rouen. She was also the heiress of one Jean Ballandonne and it appears that she brought a dowry of 5000 livres to her husband ⁵. The families of Jacques and his wife belonged to the « bonne bourgeoisie » of Rouen. Jacques is spoken of as « noble homme », and appears in a lawsuit with Pierre d'Angoulle, sieur des Valeurs, 1643, again with Pierre de Varroc, sieur de Liéville in the same year ; as lawyer in several acts of tabelionage, May 25th, 1646 ; and in April of the succeeding year in a case concerning the acquisition of some houses for the

1. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 15-26.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

establishment of a monastery for repentant women. This same year he was made receiver-general and « *dépensier ordinaire* » of the local hospital for a term of three years ¹. He lived in several parishes, Saint-Nicaise, Saint-Denis, Saint-Godard and Saint-Vivien. While at Saint-Nicaise his father Jean died, 1639, at the age of 69 years, and three years later his mother, Marie de Blosserville. Both were buried in the chapel of La Vierge, church of Saint-Godard ². After his parents' death Jacques went to Saint-Godard where his son, the poet Jacques, was born and was baptised, according to the baptismal register, on the 21st day of January : — « 21 janvier 1644, baptême de Jacques, fils de M. Jacques Pradon, avocat en la Cour, et damoiselle Marguerite de Lastre; Parrain, noble homme maître Guillaume Godefroy, Grenetier au magasin à sel d'Evreux; marraine, Anne Louiset » ³. The child's name appears in some « *lettres d'affiliation* » to the convent of the Carmes Déchaussés, Paris, 17th Sept. 1645 : — « *lettres accordées Jacobo Pradon, Mariæ Pradon, Margueritæ Delestre, Margueritæ Pradon, Franciscæ Pradon, Jacobo Pradon* » ⁴.

The family was composed of two boys, Jacques and Joseph, and three girls, Françoise, Marguerite, and Thérèse ⁵. Of the girls little is known beyond the fact that Françoise died August 6th, 1702, and Marguerite, April 24th. 1714 ⁶. These are the sisters of the poet to whom the frères Parfaict refer in their suggestion that more detailed facts of his life might be had from the curé of St.-Vivien at Rouen : — « *Paroisse où les deux sœurs de Pradon ont été enter- rées, il y a quelques années* » ⁷. Thérèse died in 1729

1. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 17. A son Claude died in 1639, buried in the chapel of La Vierge at Saint Godard.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

7. *Histoire du Théâtre français*, Paris, 1748, XIII, 77 note.

at the convent of the Hospitaliers de Saint-François of Rouen ¹.

Joseph Pradon became an acolyte in 1685, « sous-diacre » and priest in 1687, and curé of Braquetuit January 1689. This charge brought him a rather large revenue. The Jansenist inclined Duchesse de Longueville had named to it two successive ecclesiastics. Upon the death of the last one in 1665, the son of the great Condé, Henri Jules de Bourbon, as honorary guardian of the feeble-minded son of the Duc de Longueville, appointed Joseph Pradon to the parish. He became curé in 1689 and died January 17th, 1711 ². Joseph took an interest in poetic composition and several of his works were crowned at the Palinods of Rouen in 1674, 1675, and 1677 ³. He is mentioned as follows in the history of the Palinods of his city : « Il (the poet) avait un frère nommé Joseph, mort curé de Braquetuit, au diocèse de Rouen, en 1711, et était en 1672 le Pradon qui ajoutait le jeune pour se distinguer de Nicolas. Il remporta en cette année le prix de l'ode française ; Laodice, en était le sujet. Il mit cette ode en vers alcaïque en 1677 et fut également couronné. Dans cet intervalle, et en 1674, il avait réussi dans le même genre ; et cependant de deux odes latines qu'il avait présentées, une seule obtient le Miroir d'Argent, elle était sur Horace Cocles : le héros de la seconde était Jupiter dans tout l'appareil de sa puissance, conformément à la pensée d'un grand poète (Horace Canu, 811, 1, 7) clarus giganteo triumpho : ce tableau ne fut que votif et purement gratuit. La Victoire de Judith lui valut un autre prix de vers alcaïques en 1675,

1. Beaurepaire : *Notice sur le poète Pradon*, p. 22-23. — She was pensionnaire. By her will she asked to be buried in the cemetery of the Hospitaliers in her religious garb. In a request to the Intendant she signs herself Thérèse de Nauville-Pradon. The seignorial name Nauville for Esnauille which she joins to her name proves she was related by parentage to the branch of the Pradons d'Esnauille and that this branch must have been extinct in 1729.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

3. Guiet et Tongard : *Les trois Siècles palinodiques*, Paris and Rouen, 1898, II, 176-177.

et celle d'Hippomène sur Atalante, un prix de vers alexandrins » ¹.

The son Jacques was a lawyer like his father but a lawyer « ad honores », for there is no record of his pleading at Rouen. Father and son belonged to the congregation of Sainte Vierge founded by the Jesuits of Rouen. In the register of this congregation for January 24th, 1665 to January 17th, 1667, there is mention of alms given by MM. Pradon, father and son, 3 livres, at the same time that other alms were given by lawyers of the congregation ². The same register shows under *Mises*, in 1676, a sum of 6 livres for readings at the burial of MM. de Frenelles, Langlois, Alexandre, and Pradon. It appears then that Jacques' father died July 24th, 1676, at the age of 74 years ³.

His mother, Marguerite Delastre, is mentioned at her marriage in 1635 as the daughter and heiress of the late Charles Delastre ⁴. The name of Delastre was a well known one in Rouen. Bernard de Lastre is recorded in 1625 in the epitaphs of the church and cloister of the convent des Jacobins of Rouen, chapel of St.-Bernard ⁵; a Dom Fustian de Lastre, Prieur de Saint-Vandrille, appears in 1638 among the documents of the abbey of St.-Vandrille ⁶. Better known than these was the poet Charles De Lastre crowned in 1614 for some verses on « La Vierge heureuse entre les mauvais signes ». Two years after this he received the palm which was first prize for the « chant royal ». He again received this favor in 1620 for some descriptive verses about the deluge; in

1. *Ibid.*, II, 176-177.

2. Beaurepaire : *Notice sur le voûte Pradon*, p. 18.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

5. Farin : *Histoire de la ville de Rouen*, part. III, 1608, p. 247 : « Cy gisent les nobles Fondateurs de plusieurs obits en ceste Chapelle de St. Bernard à eux affectée par noble Seigneur Bernard de Lastre, écuyer vivant, Seigneur et Chatelain de Mondeville, qui décéda en 1625, et noble Dame Jeanne Esteur, de son vivant femme du dit Seigenur, laquelle décéda le 8 oct. 1619. Ils ont donné la vitre peinte de la chapelle. »

6. *Mercur de Gaillon ou Recueil de Pièces curieuses*, Rouen, 1876.

1623 for « Une Palme d'or croissant dans la terre »; and in 1627 for a descriptive piece, « La Métamorphose de la Massue d'Hercule en olivier ». Two years before he had composed a poem for which he received the prize for the French ode ¹. This Charles De Lastre was undoubtedly the father of Marguerite Delastre, mother of the poet Pradon. The date of her marriage to Jacques Pradon is given as 1635 and at that time she was mentioned as the daughter of the late Charles De Lastre. The activities of Charles cease with 1627, for he no longer appears at the Palinods where he had competed during some thirteen years. The date of his death is uncertain; but, as he does not appear in the records of the Palinods after 1627, it is probable that he died soon after that date. Since there is no other Charles De Lastre whose death is recorded between 1627 and 1635, it seems probable that « le feu Charles De Lastre » mentioned in connection with the marriage of Marguerite to Jacques Pradon was the grandfather of the poet ².

Pradon therefore inherited the poetic strain which he was to follow in later years from his maternal grandfather, and like his brother Joseph, crowned on three occasions at the Palinods, received the same inspiration toward literary effort. In this connection it is worthy of note that the poet Pradon was also awarded the crown at the Palinods in 1664 for some verses on « Le Péch^e originel » ³. A direct influence of the poetic vein coming from the mother's side, aided and influenced by the example of the grandfather appears in the literary beginnings of the brothers.

The family fortune of the Pradons during this period was uncertain. The father while engaged in his legal practice was not successful in the management of his wife's affairs, for she was forced to obtain on April 30th, 1674, a separa-

1. Guiot et Tougard : *Les trois siècles palinodiques*, I, 233-234.

2. Gustave van Roosbroeck : *Notes on Pradon*, Modern Language Notes, v. XXXV, May 1920, 5, p. 312.

3. Beaurepaire : *Notice sur le poète Pradon*, p. 24.

tion of what property belonged to her from her husband's control. His will bears the date of May 9th, 1672; but on May 25th, 1675, presumably on account of this separation of property, an agreement between Jacques and his wife was drawn up in the study of one Maubert, notary of Rouen, in which the contracting parties declare : — « Craignant d'estre prévenue par la mort, ils reservoient D^{lle} Marguerite François, et Thérèse Pradon, leurs filles, en partage de leur succession, tant mobile qu'héréditaire »¹. By this act the sons were excluded from the inheritance. This act was an effort on the part of the parents to provide for their unmarried daughters whose future was not at all assured and who were more in need of what little financial aid their parents could leave them than were Jacques, at the time a promising young dramatist in Paris², or Joseph, whose career in the priesthood had probably been decided upon. The same solicitude for the daughters is apparent in the will of the mother, Marguerite Delastre, in which she calls upon Joseph to waive his rights to the inheritance she was leaving in favor of his two sisters³. There is no record to show whether Joseph carried out the request of his mother after her death on September 7th, 1709. His sisters, Marguerite and Thérèse, lived on after their brother who died in 1711⁴, so that he like Jacques had no material aid from his parents.

The poet Pradon, « le fameux Pradon », as one of his critics not very flatteringly calls him⁵, was of the respectable bourgeoisie, a « noble homme » of the robe, as were his ancestors, of good standing among his townspeople. On his mother's side he had the renown of Charles Delastre

1. *Ibid.*, p. 17, 19.

2. His first tragedy, *Pirame et Thisbé*, was produced, 1674.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

4. Marguerite Pradon died in 1714, buried in the chapel of St.-Vivien. Thérèse Pradon died in 1729, buried in the cemetery of the Hospitaliers de St.-François.

5. Vigneul-Marville : *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Littérature*, Paris, 1725, II, 89.

whose literary successes made of him a well known figure in the intellectual and cultured life of the city, an honor and distinction which would be of service to his grandsons in the society of Rouen. That they did take advantage of their birth and relationship is apparent from the early success the brothers attained in the literary competition at the Palinods. The career of Joseph from priest to curé of one of the best organised charges of the region, appointed as he was by one of the most powerful and aristocratic personages of the time, Henri Jules de Bourbon, points to a social fitness and a cultivated refinement of manners which his early training and home influence must have induced. With the poet Jacques the home environment was, doubtless, the same. If later experience made of him a ridiculous figure, ignorant and ill-kept as the biographers represent him ¹, there is no evidence of such a pitiful figure in the young poet who began his career by winning the applause of the intellectual society of his native place. It is possible that his biographers were as mistaken upon this point as they were in naming him Nicolas and in missing his date of birth by some twelve years.

It is indeed curious that almost all the literary historians have written him down Nicolas Pradon. This is especially true of biographers of the latter part of the eighteenth century. Among those contemporary to the poet there is no mention of his first name. Baillet in his *Jugements des Savans* speaks of him as « Mr. Pradon aujourd'hui vivant » with a supplementary note concerning his death ². Neither the *Mélanges d'histoire littéraire* of Vigneul-Marville ³, nor *Le Parnasse français* of Titon du Tillet ⁴ refer to him otherwise

1. *Ibid.*, II, 90 ; Nicéron : *Mémoires pour servir*, etc..., XLIII, 371-79 ; le Père Ducerceau : *La Nécessité de la Critique*, Paris, 1733, p. 116.

2. Paris and Amsterdam, 1725, IV, 387.

3. Paris, 1725, II, 89.

4. Paris, 1732, p. 476.

than Pradon, while the same indefinite mention is made of him in the *Recherches sur le Théâtre français* of de Beauchamps ¹. Nicéron in his *Mémoires* ² refers to him as Pradon. The title of the article gives « N. Pradon » but the article begins with the word « Nicolas ». As the frères Parfaict in their history of the theatre ³ in the article on the poet give Nicéron as source of their information, they have therefore accepted the name Nicolas. This name has persisted through the various later biographies down to the nineteenth century when the original error in Nicéron was explained by Foisset in an article of the *Biographie Universelle* of Michaud ⁴. The frères Parfaict refer also to the *Mercure Galant* for January 1698, but there the poet is again referred to as « Pradon ». The fault, then, appears to have been that of the editor of Nicéron. These *Mémoires*, beginning in 1727 and continuing to appear until 1745, were the work of Nicéron aided by le Père Oudin, the abbé Bonardi, J.-B. Michault, and the abbé Goujet ⁵ : « Comme Michault ignorait le nom de baptême de Pradon, il avait écrit M. Pradon, ce qui signifiait que le nom de baptême était inconnu ; mais au lieu de suivre exactement son manuscrit, le signe N fut métamorphosé en Nicolas. La faute a été copiée et répétée depuis dans le Calendrier historique des sciences, dans les Tablettes dramatiques, dans tous les Dictionnaires historiques, jusques et compris le *Nouveau Dictionnaire historique*, en 20 volumes, et même dans son abrégé en 3 volumes in-8°. Cependant l'abbé Desfontaines, qui était du pays de Pradon, et qui avait fait vainement beaucoup de recherches sur le prénom de son compatriote, écrivit à Michault lui-même qui donne ces détails dans un Fragment d'une lettre à M. l'abbé Bonardi qu'on trouve à la page 157 du tome I^{er} des *Mélanges histo-*

1. Paris, 1735, p. 258.

2. Paris, 1747, XLIII, 371.

3. Paris, 1747, IX, 350.

4. Paris, 1843-57... See note under Michaud, XXVIII, 219.

5. Quérard : *La France littéraire*, Paris, 1834, VI, 408.

riques et philologiques »¹. The original error of ascribing to Jacques Pradon the name Nicolas goes back therefore to Nicéron. If Michault wrote nearly the last half of the last volume of Nicéron's *Mémoires*, appearing as they did from 1727 to 1745², wherein the article on Pradon is found, the frères Parfaict must have copied from Nicéron the word Nicolas as written by Michault for their own *Histoire du Théâtre*, published in 1747, where Nicéron is given as source of information on the poet.

The early career of Jacques Pradon in his profession of the law remains largely a matter of conjecture. There is no record of his pleading before the local court nor have we any documentary evidence of his following the profession at all. Of his early attempts at literary composition we have the following verses which were crowned at the Palinods in 1664. These stanzas on *Le Péché originel* were recorded in the register of the Palinods under the name of Pradon with nothing to show whether they were of Jacques or Joseph. The latter, however, was accustomed to affix « le jeune » to his signature after 1672 to distinguish himself, in all probability, from his brother³. It was in this year that Joseph received the prize for the ode which encouraged him to further efforts at the Palinods :

Ce crime originel ayant souillé notre estre,
En chassa l'innocence en la faisant périr,
Tel en devint l'effet que, sur le point de naistre,
Par son poison fatal, on nous vit tous mourir.

Mais cette triste loy n'a pas esté suivie,
La Fille de Sion eut un plus heureux sort,
Et l'arbre qui devoit porter le fruit de vie,
Ne pouvoit pas servir de victime à la mort.

1. Paris, 1754, I, 157, note. See also *Biographie universelle* (Michaud), Paris, 1843-57, XXVIII, 219, note.

2. Quérard : *La France littéraire*, VI, 408.

3. *Les trois Siècles palinodiques*, II, 177.

Bien qu'il ait triomphé de toute la nature,
L'ayant fait succomber dessous sa pesanteur,
Il se voit terrassé par cette créature
Qui nous devoit un jour donner le créateur.

Le démon, furieux, qui craint cette conquête,
Pour en rompre l'effet oppose les enfers,
Mais ce captif vaincu par cette illustre teste,
Auroit-il pu jamais la charger de ses fers ?

Cet astre dissipa ces nuages funèbres
Par l'ornement pompeux d'un éclat non pareil ;
Cette aurore naissante au milieu des ténèbres,
Malgré tant de brouillards fit lever un soleil.

De la Divinité cette image fidelle,
Dans la conception de son corps virginal,
Ne pouvoit recevoir de tache originelle,
Puisqu'elle fut conforme à son original ¹.

All the biographers maintain a silence concerning the early life of Pradon. Beaurepaire finds no trace of further literary effort of the poet at Rouen beyond the date of his appearance at the Palinods. In this he has followed the statement of Nicéron : « Il vient d'assez bonne heure à Paris », an idea which has held ground throughout the various biographical dictionaries. It was assumed that he came to Paris early, lived in intimate relations with some of the wits of the day, and supported himself in some unexplained way until the production of his first tragedy, *Pirame et Thisbé*, in 1674. The poet states, however, in the dedicatory epistle to the play addressed to the Duc de Montausier : « Plus d'une raison indispensable m'oblige à vous dédier cet Ouvrage. Il est né dans une Province où les Muses font gloire d'estre de votre Gouvernement, aussi bien que ses Peuples ; et d'ailleurs, Monseigneur, vous l'avez trop honoré de vostre protection à la Cour, pour paraître sous un autre nom que le votre » ².

1. Beaurepaire : *Notice sur Pradon*, p. 24.

2. *Epître de Pirame et Thisbé*.

If Pradon could say this to the Duc de Montausier who was governor of Normandy from 1663 to 1668 ¹, it is evident that *Pirame et Thisbé* was not written at Paris under the influence of the précieux salons of the day, as has been maintained by literary critics ², but in his native city of Rouen at some time between the years 1663 and 1674, the date of its production, in the period succeeding the first literary triumph of the author at the Palinods in 1664. The Duc de Montausier left Rouen in September, 1668 ³ to take up his new duties with his royal pupil. It is between this date and that of the production of the tragedy in 1674 that Pradon left his native city with his first ambitious literary work completed to try his fortune at the capital, trusting to gain the protection of the doubly important duke whom he most certainly must have known in some manner at Rouen. Indeed it was the custom for the governor to be present at all sittings of the Académie des Palinods where Pradon's name and that of his family were not unknown ⁴. Furthermore, he, a man of letters from Normandy, could depend upon a reception at the Hôtel Montausier, for « c'est ainsi que par un de ses gouverneurs, la Normandie se rattache étroitement à toutes les grâces raffinées de cet hôtel célèbre... et où se rassemblaient souvent, avec beaucoup d'autres célébrités, la plupart des spirituelles Normandes dont nous aimons à évoquer la présence dans la grande salle des Palinods, le jour de la fête de la Conception de la Vierge » ⁵. Such protection Pradon acknowledges in his dedicatory remarks when he says : « Et d'ailleurs, Monseigneur, vous l'avez trop honoré de vostre pro-

1. Victor Cousin : *La Société française au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1905, II, 45.

2. See *Mémoires* of Nicéron ; *Biog. nouvelle*, Didot, article Pradon : M^{lle} Bosquet, *Revue de Rouen* and Quérard : *La France littéraire*.

3. *Mémoires* de M. le duc de Montausier écrits sur les *Mémoires* de Madame la duchesse d'Uzès, sa fille, par N. (le Père Petit), Paris, 1736, 2 vol. ; also Amédée Roux : *Montausier, sa vie et son temps*, Paris, Didier, 1861.

4. Edmond Frère : *Une séance de l'Académie des Palinods en 1640*, Rouen, 1867, p. 2-3.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

tection à la Cour, pour paroître sous un autre nom que le votre » ¹.

Additional light upon Pradon's efforts to obtain the favor and protection of the Montausiers is shown in some verses included in the dedicatory epistle of the *Pirame*, which were apparently written some years before the production of the play. This passage of the epistle seems curious enough to warrant its citation in full, for none of the biographers of the poet mention the verses and it has been generally assumed that, with the exception of the poem on *Le Pêché originel*, there were no extant examples of the poet's work previous to his first tragedy :

« Pour effacer un jour tous leurs faits inouïs,
Qu'il suive seulement les traces de Louis ;
L'Antiquité n'a point de si parfait Modèle,
Ta gloire est de l'en rendre une Image fidelle,
Un exemple si grand suffit à l'exciter,
Et pour les passer-tous, il n'a qu'à l'imiter » ².

Je n'ay pu m'empescher, Monseigneur, de répéter icy ces Vers, que j'eus l'honneur de vous présenter il y a quelques années ; Vous les receutes si favorablement, que j'espère un pareil traitement pour *Pirame et Thisbé*. C'est un coup d'essay pour le Théâtre que vous avez eu la bonté d'approuver. »

The tragedy of *Pirame* was then his first long composition. As for the verses in the *Epître*, it is possible that they were written either in 1668 or the year following, when Montausier had already assumed direction of the Dauphin's education ; that Pradon composed them at Rouen on the eve of his departure for Paris, congratulating the duke on his appointment as governor of the Dauphin and hoping thereby to gain favor and secure the production of his first dramatic work. A recent historian has pointed out that Montausier was accustomed to offer protection to the poets of the day, especially to those who had been of service to him in the

1. *Epître de Pirame et Thisbé*.

2. The quotation marks are Pradon's.

composition of the famous Guirlande de Julie (1641) of whom Corneille was the most illustrious : « On connaît le zèle emporté de M. de Montausier pour tous ces auteurs qui avaient travaillé à la fameuse Guirlande de Julie. L'époux de Julie d'Angennes, représentant et héritier direct du fameux hôtel, était engagé d'honneur à la défense des hommes qui en avaient fait l'ornement et la gloire. Aussi menaçait-il d'envoyer les médisants rimer dans la rivière ; aussi s'employait-il à faire refuser le privilège nécessaire à la publication de l'Art poétique »¹. At the time of Pradon's entrance into this society fashion had changed somewhat in literature and manners, but the précieux spirit of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had taken a more pronounced form among those who surrounded Julie d'Angennes, Duchesse de Montausier.

The beginnings of the poet were modest, but in no way obscure. His early attempts at literary composition were not numerous yet he had no cause for discouragement when he set out for Paris with his first tragedy. *Pirame et Thisbé* was presented at the Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1674². In his preface the author speaks modestly of himself, calling attention to his inexperience in the ways of the theatre :

« Après que le Public est venu en foule à cette Pièce, et l'a honorée assez longtemps de son assiduité, je ne devrois point répondre avec scrupules de quelques Particuliers ; c'est plutôt un remerciement qu'une justification que je luy dois aujourd'hui. Cependant sans me prévaloir d'une réussite qui a bien passé mes espérances, je dirai d'abord ingénument que je ne prétends pas que ce coup d'essai pour le Théâtre soit un chef-d'œuvre. Il y a sans doute bien des choses qui pourroient être mieux tournées ; mais quoi qu'il en soit, elle a eu le bonheur de plaire ; et c'est la première Règle du Théâtre »³.

It is evident that his first efforts brought forth criticism on the part of certain individuals whom one is tempted to

1. Deltour : *Les Ennemies de Racine*, Paris, 1879, p. 58.

2. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. de Théâtre françois*, XI, 348.

3. Préface de *Pirame et Thisbé* : *Œuvres de M. Pradon en deux tomes, nouvelle édition, corrigée et augmentée*, Paris, par la compagnie des Libraires associés, 1744.

identify with those who later caused him trouble. According to the *Registre* of La Grange, the play appears to have passed into the repertory of the troupe of Molière. In the year 1679 it was given on June 30th, July 2nd, Oct. 3rd : in 1680, on July 9th, Sept. 16th, Dec. 6th. In 1681 there was one performance of it on May 22nd ; in 1682, another of June 1st, and during the years 1683, 1684, 1685, it was given once each year, on June 15th, July 8th, and Aug. 17th respectively ¹. The frères Parfaict say that it held the stage for nearly forty years ². Encouraged by his initial success, Pradon in his preface promises a second tragedy : « Ce récit a tiré tant de larmes et a fait un si grand effet que s'il échape à ma plume une seconde Pièce de Théâtre, je souhaite de tout mon cœur qu'elle soit remplie de fautes de cette nature » ³.

His second play, *Tamerlan ou la Mort de Bajazet* was presented at the Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1675 ⁴ and printed in 1676 ⁵. The play after a short run was withdrawn on account, the poet claims, of the enmity of his critics and a deliberate effort to stifle the play :

« Si Thisbé n'avoit pas été si loin peut-être qu'on eût laissé un libre cours à Tamerlan et qu'on ne l'eût pas étouffé (comme on a fait) dans le plus fort de son succès. C'est le jugement que tous les Gens désintéressés, et qui n'agissent point par les ressorts de la Cabale ont fait de cette injustice, qui m'a été plus glorieuse dans le monde qu'un plus ample succès. Cependant, je ne doute pas qu'il n'y ait plusieurs fautes dans cet Ouvrage ; je ne prétends pas être infaillible ; et si nos Maîtres du Théâtre, qui y règnent avec tant d'empire et de justice, sont exposés eux-mêmes à des Critiques qui leur ont donné tant d'émotion, pourquoi un jeune Auteur qui commence, et qui n'est encore qu'à sa seconde Pièce en seroit-il plus exempt qu'eux ? Il seroit seulement à souhaiter que ces Messieurs tinssent le même

1. La Grange : *Registre*, Paris, 1876, p. 219, 223, 235, 243, 249, 261, 291, 317, 336, 356.

2. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre*, XI, 348.

3. *Préface de Pirame et Thisbé* : *Œuvres de M. Pradon en deux tomes, nouvelle édition, corrigée et augmentée*, Paris, par la compagnie des Libraires associés, 1744.

4. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre*, XI, 430.

5. Oursel : *Nouvelle biographie normande*, II, 388, Paris, 1866.

language qu'ils font tenir à leurs Héros ; qu'en faisant leurs Ouvrages, ils fissent admirer en même temps leur procédé, et que les sentiments de leur cœur fussent aussi généreux et aussi grands que ceux de leur esprit »¹.

Evidences of the success of this play are confusing. Pradon gives the impression that it was not given a fair trial. Titon du Tillet in his commentary on it says : « La Tragédie de *Tamerlan* eut de grands applaudissements dans le temps qu'elle parut pour la première fois et on disoit le heureux Tamerlan du malheureux Pradon »². This opinion is in contradiction to that of Subligny, a contemporary of the poet somewhat favorably disposed to him : « Je ne veux point examiner si la brusque fierté de Tamerlan doit sa prompte chute aux brigues indignes de M. Racine ou au défaut de sa propre »³. The *Registre* of La Grange shows that the play was taken up by the Troupe de l'Hôtel de Guénégaud, November 26th, 28th, 30th, and December 3rd of 1677, and again in 1679 on March 10th and 11th.⁴

The tragedy was dedicated to « Monsieur des Marets, Conseiller du Roy, en tous les Conseils, et Maistre des Requestes, ordinaire de son Hostel ». This dedication throws light on the poet's efforts to gain a livelihood which he certainly did not acquire from two tragedies of doubtful success. Details of his life and manner of living at this time are lacking and we can only conjecture what source of income he had at his disposal. The reference to him quoted above as « le malheureux Pradon » suggests not only misfortune in his literary efforts but in his private life as well. The favor of the Duc de Montausier could not have sufficed for his personal needs. In the society of his time where men of letters were wont to rely upon the favors of the great, Pradon was justified in seeking aid from one whose fortune

1. *Preface of Tamerlan*, edition, Paris, 1744.

2. Titon du Tillet : *Le Parnasse français*, Paris, 1732, p. 471.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Registre de La Grange*, p. 197, 214.

was ample and whose position was such that he could be of assistance. There was, then, an effort on Pradon's part to gain financial aid from Des Marets, nephew of Colbert and recently appointed Maître des Requêtes, but we do not know whether this flattering dedication brought him any recompense.

On Sunday the third of January 1677, the third tragedy, *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, was produced ¹. There has been some dispute about the length of time this play held the stage. The *Registre* of La Grange mentions the first production as *Phèdre et Hippolyte, pièce nouvelle de M. Pradon* ², but the succeeding performances are given merely as *Phèdre*. From Jan. 3rd to the close of the *Registre*, Aug. 21st, 1685, a play named *Phèdre* is mentioned seventy times. It has been difficult, therefore, to know just how many of these performances were devoted to *Phèdre et Hippolyte*. Pradon makes the claim that « le Public m'en fit la justice toute entière pendant trois mois » ³. A recent writer on the quarrel of the *Phèdres* denies Pradon's contention and states that his play lasted about one month ⁴. Now according to the *Registre* of La Grange the tragedy had thirteen successive performances during January. In February it was given on the 5th, 7th, and 9th. Molière's *Le Festin de Pierre* put into verse by Thomas Corneille was presented on the 12th and ran until the 19th, when a *Phèdre* appeared with subsequent performances on the 21st and 23rd. These representations during February refer in all probability to Pradon's play, for Racine's tragedy was not printed until March 15th, 1677 and thus could not be used by the rival troupe at the Guénégaud before that date. On May 4th a *Phèdre* is mentioned in conjunction with

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 47 ; La Grange : *Registre*, p. 187.

2. La Grange : *Registre*, p. 187.

3. Pradon : *Nouvelles remarques sur tous les ouvrages de M. D****, La Haye, 1685, p. 70.

4. G. Mongredien : *Une vieille querelle : Racine et Pradon*, Revue bleue, janv. 15, 1921, p. 54.

Le Cocu imaginaire and was repeated on the 7th and 9th, after which date it was replaced by *Le Festin de Pierre* referred to above. *Phèdre* appeared again May 18th, 21st, 23rd and was once more replaced by *Le Festin de Pierre*. From this date on there is no further mention of any *Phèdre* for one year and four months. If the play represented in May was Racine's work and not Pradon's, as some critics contend, it seems strange that such a well-merited play had so few performances and that there should be a lapse of fourteen months before its reappearance. It is worth noting at the same time that during this period of a year and four months not one tragedy by Racine is recorded on the *Registre*, but on Sept. 23rd, 1678, *Bérénice* appears, followed by *Phèdre* on the 25th. The assumption that the *Phèdre* given in May 1677 was Racine's has arisen doubtless from its superiority over Pradon's tragedy, but, considering the lapse of time from May 1677 until Sept. 25th, 1678 when no tragedy bearing the name *Phèdre* was given, it seems quite probable that the May record refers to Pradon's piece. The poet himself infers that it had a run of three months. Granted that the mention of performances in May 1677 refers to his play, it is evident that the tragedy was represented during the months of January, February, and May, but only during January were the performances consecutive. Pradon has then some claim to be heard when he says that the public accorded him its favor during three months. The critics, for the most part, have decided that he meant to give the impression that his play ran for three consecutive months and have accused him of falsehood, yet the facts seem to show that the play was given during three months. Perhaps, after all, this is what Pradon meant. Paul Mesnard in his *Notice sur Phèdre* preceding his edition of Racine's tragedy¹ states that Pradon's play had twenty-four performances, which shows that he accepted the May record as referring to Pradon's

1. *Œuvres de Racine*, édition *Grands Ecrivains*, III, 255.

tragedy but he has made a miscount. The correct figure is twenty-five.

The composition of this piece took but a short time. In fact the poet acknowledges in the final remarks to his preface that he spent three months in writing the tragedy : « Au reste, je ne doute point qu'on ne trouve quelques fautes dans cette Pièce, dont les vers ne m'ont coûté que trois mois, puisqu'on en trouve bien dans celles qu'on a été deux ans à travailler et à polir ». The similarity of this work to Racine's *Phèdre* will be discussed later. That Pradon wrote his play in the spirit of rivalry is apparent from the following : « Ainsi j'avoue franchement que ça n'a point été un effet du hasard qui m'a fait rencontrer avec M. Racine, mais un pur effet de mon choix » ¹. The quarrel of the *Phèdres* which arose from this rivalry was most unfortunate for the poet. By working in direct competition with Racine he brought upon himself the attacks of Boileau and of all the partisans of Racine, who, although hostile to Pradon, had until then lacked a real cause and suitable reason for attack. The preface shows that Pradon felt this general hostility and was aware of its source ². The attack referred to occurs in Boileau's *Épître VII* addressed to Racine :

Mais pour un tas grossier de frivoles esprits,
Admirateurs zélés de toute œuvre insipide,
Que, non loin de la place où Brioché ³ préside,
Sans chercher dans les vers ni cadence ni son,
Il s'en aille admirer le savoir de Pradon ⁴.

From *Phèdre* dates the bitter campaign carried on by Boileau against Pradon until the poet's death. The tragedy is dedicated to the Duchesse de Bouillon who took a lively

1. *Préface de Phèdre et Hippolyte*, Paris, 1677, Jean Ribou.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Jean Brioché, manipulator of marionettes, located near the Pont-Neuf at the end of the rue Guénégaud, theatre in which the *Phèdre et Hippolyte* of Pradon was played.

4. *Épître VII*, lines 102-106.

interest in its success. The play had sixteen performances before the tragedy of Racine gained the public's full approval ¹. The reason for the support which Madame de Bouillon and her brother the Duc de Nevers gave to Pradon's play will be discussed later. Its initial success depended upon the favor of prominent social figures and the aid given by the précieux society of the Montausier salon. Among the frequenters of the Hôtel de Rambouillet had been M^{lle} de la Garde, afterward Madame Des Houlières, who, according to Sainte-Beuve : « avait fréquenté les derniers jours de l'Hôtel de Rambouillet et pris un rang distingué, entre les précieuses. Somaise n'a pas manqué de l'enregistrer dans son grand Dictionnaire sous le nom de Dioclée » ². It is quite probable that Pradon met her at the Montausier salon. Her daughter, M^{lle} Des Houlières, tells us that Pradon frequented her mother's salon : « Pradon venait souvent chez ma mère pour laquelle il avait beaucoup de considération, et au goût de qui il avait assez de confiance pour la venir consulter sur les ouvrages qu'il faisait » ³. It was this same Madame Des Houlières who introduced him at the Hôtel de Bouillon ⁴. Once more the poet found a patron in one of the most important families of the capital, and the Duchesse de Bouillon and the Duc de Nevers became from a spirit of « parti pris » and for other reasons Pradon's protectors. This Duc de Nevers was according to Saint-Simon :

« Un Italien de beaucoup d'esprit qui faisoit les plus jolis vers du monde ; qui ne lui coûtoient rien, et sur-le-champ : fort riche, il ne tient qu'à lui de faire une grande fortune à l'ombre de la mémoire du Cardinal Mazarin. » ⁵

He too had been a frequenter of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Pradon was therefore not so much passing from one set of

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 47-60. .

2. Sainte-Beuve : *Portraits de Femmes : Une ruelle poétique sous Louis XIV*, p. 370.

3. Sainte-Beuve : *Causeries*, XIII, 386 : Les Nièces de Mazarin.

4. Deltour : *Les Ennemis de Racine*, Paris, 1859, p. 85.

5. *Mémoires*, V, 175.

powerful friends to another as he was continuing in the same environment with a mere change of influential persons. His lack of judgment in competing with a poet so far beyond him in poetic skill was due either to a misconception of his powers as a dramatic poet or to a desire to please those social leaders whose favor he sought and who had urged him to such a competition. The success of *Pirame* should not have encouraged him to attempt to equal Racine. The poet's modesty in the prefaces to his earlier plays is in marked contrast to the peculiar effrontery of the preface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte* and would lead one to suspect that he was advised to make the fatal attempt which cost him his reputation.

Angered at the criticism directed against *Phèdre et Hippolyte* and possibly at its ultimate failure, Pradon attempted to defend his manner of treating the subject and at the same time to ridicule his critics in a comedy to which he refers in his preface :

« Je n'ai point parlé ici de la conduite de cet ouvrage ; elle a été généralement trop approuvée quoique je me sois un peu éloigné de celle d'Euripide et de Sénèque, mais j'en feroi voir la raison en un autre lieu par une dissertation plus ample que je donnerai au public. » ¹

and later in his *Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les Ouvrages du Sieur D... : 2*

« J'avois même fait en ce temps une Critique en vers sur la *Phèdre* de M. R*** parce que le bruit courut qu'il en faisoit une sur la mienne. Celle que j'apportay à l'Hôtel de Guénégaud étoit une pièce en un Acte que je leus à des personnes du premier Rang ; elle les divertit assez et auroit peut-être fait connoître que les endroits les plus beaux, et les plus sérieux sont quelquefois susceptibles du plus grand comique. Cela n'ôte rien de la *Phèdre* de M. Racine que j'estime fort. Cette petite Critique s'intituloit : Le jugement d'Apollon sur la *Phèdre* des anciens. Elle étoit prête à paroître sur le théâtre de Guénégaud mais par politique on la supprima. »

1. Preface of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

2 Paris, 1685, with fictitious printing mark : *La Haye chez Jean Stick*, p. 77.

On December 17th, 1677, the *Electre* of Pradon was produced at the Théâtre de Guénégaud with slight success, having only eight performances the last of which occurred Jan. 4th 1678¹. Owing to the bad reception accorded it by the public or to its little worth, he never saw fit to publish it. De Visé in the *Mercure Galant* makes slight mention of it : « Comme nous allons entrer dans la Saison des Plaisirs, je croy que j'auray à vous parler le mois prochain de plusieurs Divertissemens. On n'a veu que les anciens Opera pendant celui-ci et rien n'a paru de nouveau sur le Théâtre, à l'exception de l'*Electre* de M. Pradon qui a esté jouée par la Troupe du Faubourg S.-Germain »².

That Pradon's success with the public was not wholly a fictitious one is apparent from the efforts of the troupe of the Théâtre de Guénégaud during the period preceding the production of *Electre* to attract the public to the forthcoming performance. They gave on the 26th of November a representation of his *Tamerlan* which was repeated three times thereafter. The frères Parfaict, in explaining the statement of the *Mercure Galant* : « On n'a vu que les anciens Opera, et rien n'a paru de nouveau sur le Théâtre », give us what little information we possess on the tragedy of *Electre*. It seems the players hoped to find a play in this one which not only would tide them over a season, made up largely of revivals, but which would introduce something new to their public and bring them profit :

« Cette année fut presque aussi stérile en nouveautés que la précédente, les deux Troupes se trouvèrent obligées de recourir aux anciennes Pièces : celle de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne fit paroître le *Jodelet Maître et Valet* de M. Scarron, et le *Dom Bertrand de Cigarral* de M. Corneille de l'Isle. La Troupe de l'Hôtel de Guénégaud donna cinq représentations des *Visionnaires* de M. Desmarêts, autant des *Charmes de Félicie*, Pastorale de M. de Montauban, et ensuite trois du *Désespoir Extravagant*, Comédie d'un Auteur Anonyme, vrai-semblablement très foible puisqu'elle n'a jamais été imprimée. Pour appuyer cette

1. *Registre de La Grange*, p. 198.

2. De Visé : *Mercure Galant*, Paris, 1677, p. 314.

dernière Pièce, ils la firent précéder par les *Fourberies* de Scapin. Voilà de quelle façon cette Troupe passa son Été, espérant néanmoins que le succès d'*Electre* la dédommageroit amplement. Les Comédiens voulurent prévenir le Public en faveur de l'Auteur par quelques représentations de sa Tragédie de *Tamerlan*. » ¹

At this point there is a lapse of two years during which time nothing is known of the poet. He does not appear on the register of the theatres and there are no facts to reveal in what he was engaged or how he maintained himself. It is possible that he abandoned the theatre, disheartened by the notoriety which had attended his *Phèdre et Hippolyte* and the ill-success of *Electre*.

His tragedy of *La Troade* was produced January 17th, 1679, at the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne ². The *Mercure Galant* gives the impression that the play attracted some attention : « *La Troade*, tragédie nouvelle de M. Pradon, a parue depuis quinze jours sur le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne. Leurs Altesses Royales en ont honoré une représentation de leur préférence. C'est un avantage que s'attirent ordinairement les pièces qui font du bruit » ³. The poet's remarks in his preface lead one to suppose that it had more than a passing performance : « Cependant je ne dois pas me plaindre du destin de cette pièce : puis qu'après avoir attiré toute la cour à Paris dans ses premières représentations, elle a eu l'honneur d'estre représentée devant Sa Majesté ; qui l'a honorée d'une attention particulière, et de ses applaudissements » ⁴. It is apparent that it ran for a sufficient time to allow the critics to circulate this sonnet which, if accepted as an unbiased opinion of the piece, gives us a poor idea of the subject matter :

D'un crêpe noir Hécube embéguinée,
Lamente, pleure, et grimace toujours ;
Dames en deuil courent à son secours ;
Onques ne fut plus lugubre journée.

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 72-73.

2. *Ibid.*, XII, 138.

3. *Mercure Galant*, janv. 1679, p. 33.

4. Preface to *La Troade*, Paris, 1679.

Ulysse vient, fait nargue à l'hyménée,
Le cœur féru de nouvelles amours ;
Pyrrhus et lui font de vaillans discours ;
Mais aux discours leur vaillance est bornée.

Après cela, plus que confusion,
Tant il n'en fut dans la grande Ilion,
Lors de la nuit aux Troyens si fatale,

En vain Baron ¹ attend le brouhaha,
Point n'oseroit en faire la cabale,
Un chacun baille, et s'endort, ou s'en va ².

The following epigram is equally severe :

Quand j'ai vu de Pradon la Pièce détestable,
Admirant du destin le caprice fatal,
Pour te perdre, ai-je dit, Ilion déplorable
Pallas a toujours un cheval ³.

The dedicatory epistle is addressed to « Monseigneur le Duc d'Aumont, Pair de France, Premier Gentilhomme de la Chambre du Roy, Gouverneur de Boulogne et du Boulonnais, etc. » ⁴, to whom the poet writes :

« Je n'aurois pu, sans une extrême ingratitude, mettre un autre nom que le vostre à la teste d'un ouvrage, qui n'auroit peut-estre jamais paru à la cour sans la protection dont vous l'avez honoré à Paris..... je ne dis rien, Monseigneur, de cette générosité particulière, de cette bonté prévenante, de cette magnificence extraordinaire que vous faites si souvent admirer à toute la France, puisque vostre modestie m'impose un silence que mon peu de capacité à estaler des vérités si éclatantes devoit déjà m'avoir imposé... je vous supplie donc, Monseigneur, très humblement de me continuer l'honneur de vostre protection. » ⁵

1. « Il jouait le rôle de Pyrrhus, et Champmeslé celui d'Ulysse » Frères Parfaict, XII, 140-41.

2. *Le Portefeuille de M. L. D. F.*, Cologne, 1695, p. 144-5: see Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 140.

3. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre*, XII, 140.

4. Louis-Marie-Victor, duc d'Aumont et de Rochebaron, born Dec. 9, 1632, died at Paris 1704, first « gentilhomme de chambre » of Louis XIV, governor of Boulogne and member of the Académie des Inscriptions. Saint-Simon : *Mémoires*, I, 182 ; IV, 68 ; *Biog. universelle* (Michaud), Paris, 1854, II, 457.

5. *Epître de La Troade*.

One can only surmise what aid the Duc d'Aumont afforded the poet in a more substantial manner than the favor of allowing his name to be connected with the tragedy. Perhaps he persuaded the king to honor the play by his attendance. The royal presence was a sure means of attracting the favor of the polite public.

The *Mercure Galant* for December 1679 announces a new tragedy, *Statira* ¹. The play was probably produced during the latter half of the month of December at the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne ². We have no information concerning the success of *Statira*. The *Mercure Galant* merely mentions it, although it announces in January 1680 among the notices « des Livres nouveaux du mois de mars : *Statira*, tragédie de M. Pradon, in-12, 15 sols » ³. In his preface the author informs us that the play was interrupted in its run by the illness of one of the actors : « Au reste, quoy que le cours de cette Pièce ait esté interrompu par la maladie d'un des acteurs, j'espère que la lecture pourra n'en pas déplaire, puisqu'elle a paru assez bien écrite aux plus délicats » ⁴. If the silence of the critics is a measure of its favor with the public, one would be justified in assuming for it a mild success, for there is no evidence of sarcastic comment, epigram, sonnet, or literary quarrel connected with its production. Boileau in his *Satires* and *Epîtres* either did not deem it of enough signifi-
cance, or purposely neglected to mention it among Pradon's sins. The frères Parfaict, influenced by the closing remarks in the preface quoted above, have assumed that the play had very few performances.

After a silence of two years Pradon appears with a new tragedy, *Tarquin*, at the theatre of the Hôtel de Guénégaud, Friday, January 9th, 1682, which had but four performances,

1. *Statira*, pièce nouvelle de M. Pradon, a paru depuis peu de jours sur le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne. *Mercure Galant*, déc. 1679, p. 353.

2. The union of the two troupes took place the following year, 1680.

3. *Mercure Galant*, vol. IX (1680).

4. Preface to *Statira*, Paris, 1680.

on January 9th, 11th, 13th, and 15th ¹. The play was never printed.

From 1682 until the production of his *Regulus* in 1688, no new tragedy by the poet was presented. During this period he wrote two critical essays against the *Satires* of Boileau, occasioned, as he says in the prefaces, by the frequent attacks of the satirist upon him. The first of these diatribes, *Le Triomphe de Pradon sur les Satires du Sieur D**** appeared at Lyon in 1684 ², with a later edition of 1686 at Lyon and La Haye. It begins with a dedicatory epistle to Alcandre under which name is represented the Duc de Nevers ³. The Duc's dislike for Boileau dated from the time of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*. De Nevers suspected the satirist of having a share in writing the unfortunate sonnet against his sister, the Duchesse de Mancini, and made no secret of his ill-will for him. It is not strange, then, that Pradon should dedicate to him his diatribe against Boileau and its opening lines recall the quarrel of the *Phèdres* :

« Amy de la Justice et de la Vérité
Alcandre, dont l'esprit est rempli de clarté
Admiré des savants, Critique de Critiques
Qui puises ton Discours des Salines Attiques,
Il est temps de montrer d'un Rimeur insolent
Le Mérite imposteur et le petit talent. » ⁴

That Pradon intended to avenge himself for remarks about his work is evident from the following :

« Je m'étois persuadé avec quelque apparence que l'Auteur satyrique dans une seconde Edition, ne manqueroit pas de corriger ses ouvrages ; mais puisqu'il n'est pas voulu donner cette peine, je crois qu'il est à propos de la prendre pour luy. Et s'il n'est pas d'humeur d'en profiter j'espère au moins que le public en pourra tirer quelques lumières qui ne seront pas tout à fait inutiles. Examinons donc un

1. *Registre de La Grange*, p. 280.

2. Not in 1686 as stated by Oursel in his *Nouvelle Biographie normande*, Paris, 1886, II, 388.

3. Karl Dräger : *Le Triomphe de Pradon* (Lyon, 1684). *Eine Kritik des Discours du Roi und der drei ersten Satiren B. D.* — Inaugural dissertation, Greifswald, 1886.

4. *Le Triomphe de Pradon*, etc., Lyon, 1684.

peu ce Critique, exterminateur du menu peuple du Parnasse, qui a tracé de si belles Règles aux Poètes. Ce style badaud, le fléau des petits Auteurs, ce fameux Despréaux qui a eu l'Art d'imposer si longtemps avec le plus faible talent du monde, quelque nouveauté dans ses manières, ses citations modernes, ses émistiches revez, quelques vers frapans, enfans d'une longue méditation, mal amenés souvent, et plus mal placés, ont d'abord surpris et abusé bien des gens. Il a joui quelque tems de l'approbation de la multitude : mais après un peu de réflexion, on n'a plus crié au miracle, on a ouvert les yeux, on a connu qu'il étoit homme, et comme tel, capable de faire ses fautes. Nous admirons, s'il le veut ainsi, la force de ses vers, et la nouveauté de ses expressions, mais il nous permettra en même tems de remarquer la stérilité de son imagination, et la petitesse de son génie. Nous louerons ce qu'il y aura de bon dans ses ouvrages, et nous prendrons la liberté de blâmer ce qu'il y aura de mauvais. » ¹

The second of these attacks against his arch-enemy, Boileau, appeared in 1688 with a fictitious name of printer as well as place of printing ². It purports to come from the press of Jean Stich, La Haye, and is mentioned by La Chèvre in his *Bibliographie des Recueils* as a continuation of *Le Triomphe de Pradon*... ³ The author in his preface accuses his enemies of hindering the printing of these *Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les Ouvrages du Sieur D**** for a year :

« Ami Lecteur, cet ouvrage ne part point d'une démangeaison d'écrire assez naturelle à tous les Auteurs ; je n'ay point envie d'insulter à Monsieur D*** quoy qu'il ait insulté tout le monde, et mon dessein n'est pas d'écrire contre luy, mais pour moy-même ; j'abandonne donc au Public ce petit ouvrage, et même à tous les Libraires qui le voudront imprimer. C'est une étrange chose qu'il ait en luy seul le Privilège de médire de tout le genre humain, et que l'on n'ait pas celuy de luy dire ses véritez. On a retenu un an entier les papiers qui le concernent et après avoir promis le visa pour les faire imprimer, on a manqué de parole, et ceux mêmes de qui il a fait des portraits Satiriques et Sanglans. » ⁴

In the dedicatory epistle Pradon speaks of this work as a « coup d'essay » in the satirical style : « Je vous jure que je n'eus

1. Preface to *Le Triomphe de Pradon*, etc., Lyon, 1684.

2. Beaurepaire : *Notice sur Pradon*, p. 10.

3. Paris, 1901, III, 486-88.

4. Preface to *Nouvelles remarques*, etc., La Haye, 1685.

jamais la moindre envie de satiriser personne. C'est mon coup d'essay, où je réussiray très mal, mais je serois fâché d'y réussir mieux et que la nature m'eut fait un présent aussi pernicieux que le talent de la Satire »¹. The *Remarques* were published clandestinely in 1685, in all probability at Paris; but, if we accept the poet's statement that the privilege to print was withheld for a year, the date at which he wrote them was 1684, the year in which appeared his *Triomphe de Pradon* at Lyon. Were they then written before or after *Le Triomphe*? The title *Nouvelles Remarques* led La Chèvre to infer that the work was a continuation of *Le Triomphe*, but the delay in the printing might well have occasioned the present title inasmuch as his satirical remarks in *Le Triomphe* had already appeared. Furthermore, the poet designates this work as a « coup d'essay » in the satirical vein.

The tragedy of *Regulus* was represented Sunday the 4th of January, 1688 with great success. The play was for Pradon a real triumph. According to the frères Parfaict the tragedy was as well received at its 28th performance as at its first and : « Elle est restée au Théâtre où on la reprend de temps en temps avec assez de succès »². This would signify its inclusion in the repertory of the theatre during the eighteenth century. In the middle of the century Voltaire complained in a letter to d'Argental of May 14th, 1764, that the tragedy of *Regulus* occupied all the attention of the actors to the detriment of his own *Triumvirat* : « Jouissez du plaisir de cette mascarade sans que les comédiens me donnent l'insupportable dégoût de mutiler ma besogne. Les malheureux jouent *Regulus* sans y rien changer, et ils défigurent tout ce que je leur donne. Je ne conçois pas cette fureur ; elle m'humilie, me désespère, et me fait faire trop de mauvais sang »³. In his *Discours prononcé avant la Représentation*

1. Préface à Monseigneur le Duc de***, *Nouvelles Remarques*, etc., La Haye, 1685.

2. Frères Parfaict : *Histoire du Théâtre français*, XIII, 69, 75, note.

3. Voltaire : *Œuvres avec notes*, etc., par M. Beuchot, Paris, 1833 (Didot),

d'Eriphyle he ascribes the public's favor for *Regulus* to the popularity of the actor Baron :

« D'un acteur quelquefois la séduisante adresse
D'un vers dur et sans grâce adoucit la rudesse :
Des défauts embellis, ne vous révoltent plus ;
C'est Baron qu'on aimait, ce n'est pas *Regulus*. » ¹

The *Mercure Galant* for January 1688 gives considerable space to this subject :

« On représente depuis un mois avec beaucoup de succès une Tragédie intitulée *Regulus*. Les plus grands hommes avoient tasté ce sujet, et quoy que l'action de ce Romain, qui retourna à Cartage, asseuré de la mort qui luy estoit préparée, leur eust paru fort touchante, ils avoient trouvé des obstacles qui leur sembloient invincibles à la réduire au Théâtre. M. Pradon a eu moins de scrupules, ou peut-estre plus de lumières, et pour faire mieux briller une si belle action, il a presté à l'Histoire des choses qu'elle ne luy fournissoit pas, et il l'a mesme changée dans les circonstances de l'action principale. Ce que fit *Regulus* est si éclatant et part d'une si grande âme, qu'on ne peut l'entendre sans l'admirer. Vous pouvez juger par là qu'il doit y avoir de grandes beautés dans cette pièce. » ²

Pradon in his preface expresses great joy at his success :
« Enfin sans faire une plus longue discussion, je puis dire que cet Ouvrage a frappé si vivement tout le public, et les Acteurs en ont remply si dignement les caractères, que cela me doit encourager à l'avenir à travailler avec plus d'application que jamais, et à chercher des sujets dont la grandeur soutienne celui de *Regulus* ».

The tragedy was dedicated to Madame la Dauphine ³

Correspondance, année 1764, LXI, 433 ; see also, Discours sur la Tragédie, II, 361.

1. *Ibid.*, III, 3.

2. *Mercure Galant*, janv. 1688, p. 341.

3. Marie-Anne-Christine-Victoire de Bavière, fille de Ferdinand, l'Électeur de Bavière, naquit à Munich en 1660. Elle épousa Louis, dauphin, fils de Louis XIV, le 7 mars 1680, à Châlons-sur-Marne, où toute la cour était allée la recevoir. Dès son début à la cour, elle y parut à son aise et tellement accoutumée qu'on eût dit qu'elle était née au Louvre. *Biographie universelle (Michaud)*, Paris, 1843-57, XXVI, 611.

with two dedicatory epistles, one in prose, and the other in verse. Why should Pradon dedicate his tragedy to her ? Never before had he directly sought the favor of royalty. Perhaps Montausier's early assistance had now brought him to the attention of the Dauphine, for the duke had been the « gouverneur » of the Dauphin. Although the royal pupil had no great liking for his master's methods, the influence of Montausier probably persisted after the Dauphin's marriage, and the duke's retainers would certainly come to the attention of this household and be favored by the royal couple. Des Marets, likewise, to whom Pradon dedicated his second tragedy, had gained in his later years the good-will of Madame la Dauphine ¹. Then there was Madame Pradon who, in the *Journal de Dangeau* for Wednesday, August 16th, 1684, is mentioned as a woman attached to the Dauphine's household : « On commença à voir Madame la Dauphine qui gardait encore le lit. Madame Pradon, sous-gouvernante des filles, eut permission de se retirer. Le roi ne voulut pas qu'elle vendit sa charge, mais il lui fit donner 8.000 francs : on devoit mettre en sa place deux sous-gouvernantes qui ne sont pas encore nommées » ². Was this Madame Pradon the poet's wife ? It is difficult to say, for there is no further record of her. It would be natural for Pradon to dedicate his tragedy of *Regulus* to his wife's mistress. He would be sure of gaining protection and favor from the Dauphine and possibly some reward from the king who four years before this time, as the quotation shows, was well pleased with the capable Madame Pradon. As if to recall to the Dauphine's attention his past achievements, Pradon wrote :

« Pour moy, tout pénétré de tes rares merveilles,
Quoyque foible, je veux te consacrer mes veilles,
Bien que depuis un temps dans un profond oubly,
Tranquille j'aye esté toujours ensevely,

1. « Des Marets avoit pour soi Madame la Dauphine par les manèges de sa femme ». Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, IX, 15.

2. *Journal de Dangeau*, August 1684, I, 44.

Sur mes écrits enfin daigne jeter la veue,
Ma Muse au Grand Louis ne fust pas inconnue,
Tamerlan et Thisbé par un sort glorieux,
Eurent tous deux l'honneur de paroistre à ses yeux. » ¹

Le Satirique françois expirant (1689), a diatribe against Boileau, has been ascribed to Pradon upon the authority of Saint-Marc. The arguments used to prove this the poet's work are unconvincing ², and La Chèvre, in his *Bibliographie des Recueils* ³, has not seen fit to include it among the works of Pradon.

In 1694 appeared *La Réponse à la Satire X du Sieur D**** ⁴, a criticism in prose of Boileau's Satire X. Pradon states in the preface his reasons for attacking this work : « Enfin la *Satire X* du sieur D*** attendue depuis si longtems, vient de paroître. Il ne doit pas trouver étrange de voir son nom dans mes vers, puisqu'il a mis le mien tout au long dans les siens, et comme il a la bonté de laisser au public la liberté de juger de son Ouvrage, je m'en serviray, s'il luy plaist, pour luy marquer les fautes que ce même public y trouve, malgré la présentation qu'il a du contraire » ⁵. This pamphlet contains critical remarks of some justice concerning this satire on *Les Femmes*, composed during the years 1692 and 1693 and appearing the latter year. The satire produced at its appearance considerable discussion among the beaux esprits whose time was spent in the circles of women and who felt called upon to rush to their defence ⁶.

1. *Dédicace en prose de Regulus.*

2. K. Draeger : *Le Triomphe de Pradon, Eine Kritik des Discours au Roy und der drei ersten Satiren Boileau Despréaux*, inaugural dissertation, Greifswald, 1886.

3. Paris, 1904, III, 486.

4. Paris, 1694, chez Robert J.-B. de la Caille, in-12, avec permission de M. le Chancelier.

5. Preface to the *Réponse à la Satire X*, etc.

6. M. Despréaux étoit presque persuadé qu'il avoit fait un mauvais ouvrage. Ce fut M. Racine qui le rassura, en lui disant qu'il falloit laisser passer l'orage : « Vous avez attaqué, dit-il, tout un corps, qui n'est composé

The reason Pradon gives for his attack against this particular satire is not the only motive, for his name had frequently appeared in previous satires of Boileau¹; and he had already replied to these in his *Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les Ouvrages du Sieur D****. Naturally one expects that Pradon, the poet of the ruelles, the favored of certain salons where the influence of women made for his success, would use this occasion to defend those who felt their judgment and taste attacked. This is especially true in the case of Madame Des Houlières at whose salon he was well received and whose connection with the affair of the sonnets concerning the two *Phèdres* made her hostile to Boileau. The lines in the tenth *Satire* devoted to this lady would be sufficient cause for reply on the part of Pradon who had twice written against the satirist and who had every reason to defend this woman. It is not strange, then, that he should defend her from such an attack as this :

Mais qui vient sur mes pas ? C'est une précieuse,
Reste de ces esprits jadis si renommés
Que d'un coup de son art Molière a difamnés.
De tous leurs sentiments cette noble héritière
Mantient encore ici leur secte façonnière.
C'est chez elle toujours que les fades auteurs
S'en vont se consoler du mépris des lecteurs.
Elle y reçoit leur plainte ; et sa docte demeure
Aux Perrins, aux Coras, est ouverte à toute heure.
Là, du faux bel esprit se tiennent les bureaux ;
Là, tous les vers sont bons, pourvu qu'ils soient nouveaux.
Au mauvais goût public la belle y fait la guerre ;
Plaint Pradon opprimé des sifflets du parterre. »²

Pradon defends the ladies thus attacked by saying :
« Tous les gens de bon goût demeurent d'accord qu'il (Despréaux) n'a point touché aux caractères des Femmes de la Cour dont les manières luy sont inconnues, et qu'il n'a dépeint

que de langues, sans compter celles des galants, qui prennent parti dans la querelle ». — *Bolarana, Collection des Ana*, X, 439.

1. *Satires VII, IX ; Eptres VI, VII, VIII.*

2. *Satire X*, édition A. Ch. Gidel, Paris, 1872, p. 83.

tout au plus que celles de la rue S.-Denis, ou de la place Maubert » ¹. The same idea is expressed in the main body of his « critique » in some verses addressed to Boileau :

« Il est vray que privé des dons de la nature,
Le Ciel ne te forme que pour lui faire injure ;
Toujours mélancholique, ou toujours furieux,
Tu n'as jamais senti les traits de deux beaux yeux,
Qui malgré ton humeur et farouche et sauvage
Auroient de tes écrits adouci le langage.
Après que le beau Sexe en méprisant tes traits
Ne se reconnoist point dans tes galants portraits ;
Tu suis mal ta Préface humble avec arrogance,
Avançant plusieurs mots dont la pudeur s'offense,
Et ton style cynique aux Dames inconnu
Ne seroit pas admis même chez la Cornu
Dont le nom doit blesser les moins chastes oreilles,
Et qui seul fait rougir jusques à ses pareilles. » ²

Regarding the line « Plaint Pradon opprimé des sifflets du parterre », the poet felt he must remind his critic that three of his tragedies had not been so ill received by this public in whose disfavor he was supposed to be : « C'est à ce même parterre à y répondre pour moy, et je croy que si le Sieur Despréaux vouloit se mêler de venir siffler *Thisbé*, *Tamerlan* ou *Regulus* qu'il y seroit sifflé luy même » ³.

The tragedy of *Germanicus*, which was presented the 22nd of December, 1694, had but six performances, the last of which occurred on the fifth of January of the ensuing year ⁴. The play was never printed. The only information we have about it comes to us from an epigram of Racine *Sur le Germanicus de Pradon* :

Que je plains le destin du grand Germanicus !
Quel fut le prix de ses rares vertus !
Persécuté par le cruel Tibère,

1. Preface to the *Réponse à la Satire X*.

2. *Réponse à la Satire X*, etc.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XIII, 391.

Empoisonné par le traître Pison :
Il ne lui manquoit plus, pour dernière misère,
Que d'être chanté par Pradon.

The following rather amusing incident is told in connection with this tragedy : « A la première représentation de cette Tragédie, les Spectateurs, étonnés de n'avoir vu paroître que des hommes dans les deux premiers actes, se disoient les uns aux autres en riant : Voilà une vraie Tragédie de collège, il n'y a point de femmes. Au commencement du troisième Acte on vit sortir tout à la fois du fond du théâtre, deux princesses et deux confidentes : et l'on entendit en même temps dans la salle une voix perçante et gasconne, qui prononça ces paroles : Quatorze de Dames, sont-ils bons ? ce qui excita un battement de mains général » ¹.

The last tragedy by Pradon, *Scipion l'Africain*, was produced Friday the 22nd of February, 1697 ². The play was presented to the comedians on the 25th of December of the preceding year but was refused ; a second reading took place on January 2nd after which it was accepted for production provided certain changes were made by the author ³. The play was not a success. De Visé makes no mention of it in the *Mercure Galant*. The only information we have about its reception by the public comes from two epigrams, one by Jean Baptiste Rousseau, the other by the poet Gacon. Rousseau in the verses addressed to Pradon confuses the *Grand Scipion*, tragedy by Prade, with Pradon's *Scipion* :

A Pradon qui avoit fait une Satire pleine d'invectives contre Boileau :

Au nom de Dieu ! Pradon, pourquoi ce grand courroux,
Qui contre Despréaux exhale tant d'injures ?
Il m'a berné, me direz-vous :
Je veux le diffamer chez les races futures.

1. La Porte et Champfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, Paris, 1775. I, 409-410.

2. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XIV, 46, note.

3. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XIV, 46.

Hé, croyez-moi, laissez d'inutiles projets.
Quand vous réussiriez à ternir sa mémoire,
Vous n'avanceriez rien pour votre propre gloire.
Et le GRAND SCIPION sera toujours mauvais. »¹

The epigram of Gacon is still more unfavorable — and Gacon was no very gifted poet himself :

Dans sa Pièce de *Scipion*
Pradon fait voir ce Capitaine
Prêt à se marier avec une Africaine.
d'Annibal, il fait un poltron.
Ses Héros sont enfin si différens d'eux-mêmes,
Qu'un quidam les voyant plus masqués qu'en un Bal
Dit que Pradon donnoit, au milieu de carême
Une Pièce de Carnaval. »²

Pradon did not live long enough to regain the favor won with *Regulus* and lost with *Scipion*. His life had been a constant struggle with opposition from a powerful party whose ideas were not his. Boileau, especially, made his road hard by the excessive ridicule which he heaped upon him. Some credit is due the man for his perseverance in the face of such opposition and in spite of the bad impression spread about his works and their unfavorable reception by the public. If he had not entered into direct competition with Racine in the unfortunate quarrel of the *Phèdres*, he might have escaped much ridicule from Boileau and Racine. He would perhaps have been classed among many other writers of tragedies of his age who, while not great, were content to turn out just such plays as the public desired. Historians represent him as one swollen with pride, lacking in judgment, obsessed with his own merit, and imagining himself the rival of Racine. Such characteristics are not revealed in the prefaces to his plays. With the exception of the preface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, where the heat of party strife caused excess of speech, the poet speaks of his work in a modest manner, free from

1. J.-B. Rousseau : *Œuvres poétiques*, Épigrammes, livre III, no. xvi, Paris, 1824.

2. Gacon : *Le Poète sans fard*, Paris, 1698, p. 205.

bombast and self-praise. His critical writings, which were, it must be recalled, replies to attacks upon his ability, show the same petulant arrogance and wounded pride that occur in his preface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, but it is doubtful whether he merits such verses as these :

Pradon tu pris si fort l'indigne caractère,
Que ta témérité croissant avec le tems,
Comme les immortels tu demandas l'encens ;
Nos premières faveurs furent peu reconnues,
La folle ambition l'éleva sur les nues :
Lors il n'écoula plus qu'une fougueuse ardeur,
Mais pour lui le mépris courut de cœur en cœur. » ¹

Not satisfied with representing the poet as an arrogant egotist, his critics, as if to round out his portrait, accused him of gross ignorance. The following anecdote is found in Brossette's note to *Épître X* of Boileau : « Un jour, dit-on au sortir d'une de ses Tragédies, M. le Prince de Conti l'ainé, luy ayant dit qu'il avait transporté en Europe une ville qui est dans l'Asie : je prie Votre Altesse de m'excuser, répondit Pradon, car je ne sçais pas trop bien la chronologie » ². This anecdote is told elsewhere in connection with Pradon's tragedy of *Tamerlan* ³. One may question the authenticity of this tale, at least as applicable to Pradon, for the reason that Brossette was on friendly terms with Boileau and accepted the tale on hearsay evidence, using it as an explanation of the lines in the *Épître* wherein Pradon is satirized. Of like quality is the anecdote copied extensively by historians from Vigneul-Marville ⁴.

« Pradon, le fameux Pradon, ayant fait une pièce de Théâtre, s'en alla le nez dans son manteau avec un ami se mêler à la foule des gens

1. M^{lle} de la Roche-Guilen : *La Pradonnade*, Amsterdam, 1711, in-12.

2. Mémoires de Brossette sur Boileau D***, appended to Correspondance entre Boileau et Brossette, édition Laverdet, Paris, 1858, p. 566.

3. La Porte et Champfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, Paris, 1775, II, 198-199.

4. *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Littérature*, Paris, 1725, II, 89-90.

qui remplissent le parterre à l'Hôtel des Comédiens, afin de se dérober à la flatterie, et d'apprendre par lui-même sans être connu, ce que le Public pensoit de son Ouvrage. Dès le premier Acte la Pièce fut sifflée. Pradon qui dans le fond ne s'attendoit qu'à des louanges et des exclamations, enragé de se voir si maltraité, perd contenance. Il rougit, il pâlit, il se mord les doigts, frappe du pied et écume de la bouche. Son ami le voyant dans ce trouble, le tire par le bras et lui dit : Monsieur, Monsieur, tenez bon contre ce revers de fortune, et si vous m'en croiez, vous moquant de ses inconstances, siflez hardiment comme les autres. Pradon revenu à lui, et trouvant ce conseil à son goût, prend son sifflet et sifle des mieux. Un Mousquetaire qui assistoit au spectacle le poussa rudement, et lui dit tout en colère : Pourquoi siflez vous, Monsieur ? La pièce est belle : son Auteur n'est pas un sot, il fait figure et bruit à la Cour. Pradon un peu trop chaud repousse le Mousquetaire, et jure comme un chartier embourbé qu'il siflera jusqu'au bout. Le Mousquetaire prend le chapeau et la perruque de Pradon, et les jette jusques sur le Théâtre. Pradon donne un soufflet au Mousquetaire et le Mousquetaire, l'épée à la main, tire deux lignes en croix sur le visage de Pradon et le veut tuer. Pradon porte à son ennemi qui l'avoit terrassé quelques coups de poings et de pieds à la dérobée : mais enfin retiré de dessous les mains de ce rude joueur par les charitables spectateurs, Pradon siflé et battu pour l'amour de luy-même gagne la porte et va se faire panser ¹.

This anecdote has been accepted on its face value by the biographers of Pradon as another bit of evidence of the poet's stupidity. The historian who first noted this tale wrote in 1725, some seventy years after Pradon's death. He gives no source for the anecdote, and, as it does not appear in the writings of the poet's contemporaries, there is room for doubt whether Pradon was really the person of the story, for any mediocre author of doubtful success with the public would have suited just as well.

The frères Parfaict have given a portrait of the man according to the report of those who knew him : « Il étoit de moyenne taille et avoir l'air extrêmement commun, le visage long et le menton fort avancé. Au reste sa triste fortune et son extérieur négligé ajoutaient encore à sa mauvaise mine » ². The few extant details of his life furnish little to judge in what manner

1. See also, Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XIII, 77-78.

2. *Ibid.*

he lived. The theatre which gave such scanty livelihood to Racine must certainly have been insufficient for Pradon's needs. How he supported himself and what favors he received from the circles in which he moved we do not know. If his personal appearance was as careless as this portrait suggests-unfortunate for him in a society where external appearance counted considerably for social preferment — the cause undoubtedly lay in the hard circumstances in which he lived. « On nous le représente comme un homme gonflé de vanité, et ce vaniteux n'a pas fait graver son portrait ; puis, lorsqu'en 1696 tout le monde courut chez les commissaires délégués par le Roi pour la révision de la noblesse et la délivrance d'armes aux vilains qui voulaient bien les payer 20 livres, il s'abstint », says one of his biographers. There exists the portrait of a J. N. Pradon, dramatic author, drawn and engraved by Corot after Rigaud, but there is some doubt whether this portrait represents the poet ¹.

Nicéron ascribes to Pradon a tragedy, *Antigone*, on the authority of some verses by le Père Ducerceau :

Sur le manteau de Regulus
On eut épargné sa personne,
Mais le pauvre homme n'avoit plus
Que le juste-au-corps d'Antigone ².

« Cette Tragédie », says Nicéron, « fut fort mal reçue, et Pradon lui-même qui estimoit toujours beaucoup ses Ouvrages, n'a jamais osé la faire imprimer... C'est par allusion au sort de ces deux tragédies, *Regulus* et *Antigone* qu'un seigneur ayant trouvé Pradon qui portoit un assez mauvais juste-au-corps sous un beau manteau d'écarlate, lui dit : Pradon, voilà le manteau de Regulus et le juste-au-corps d'Antigone » ³. The frères Parfaict have corrected Nicéron on this point

1. Beaurepaire : *Notice sur Pradon*, p. 13, note.

2. Le Père Ducerceau : *La nécessité de la Critique ou le grand Prévôt de Parnasse*, Paris, 1733, in-8°.

3. Nicéron : *Mémoires*, etc., XLIII, 371-97.

and destroyed one of the legends about Pradon : « Pour détruire ces autorités (Niceron and le Père Ducerceau) il suffit de remarquer que depuis M. Rotrou, aucun auteur n'a donné de tragédie sous le titre d'*Antigone* que M. d'Assézan qui fit paroître sa Pièce en 1686 deux ans avant *Regulus*. Sa Tragédie est imprimée ; à l'égard de M. Pradon, il est certain qu'il n'a jamais traité ce sujet. C'est par méprise que le Père du Cerceau est tombé dans cette erreur, qui sert de fondement au petit conte qu'on y a ajusté et le continuateur des Mémoires a adopté l'une et l'autre, parce qu'il ne s'est pas donné la peine de rechercher la vérité de ce fait » ¹. Nevertheless La Chèvre in his *Bibliographie des Recueils* has ascribed the tragedy of *Antigone* to Pradon ². He also mentions a novel, *Frédéric de Sicile* ³, ascribed to M^{lle} Bernard which M. Eugène Asse believes to be the poet's work ⁴. Pradon is known to have been in correspondance with M^{lle} Bernard and according to one of his biographers ⁵ was in love with her : « Pradon étoit devenu amoureux d'une jolie Gasconne, elle ne l'aimoit pas ; mais ses saillies la divertissoient. Il lui écrivoit une lettre en prose et en vers, où sa passion avoit plus de part que sa Muse. Elle lui fit une belle réponse qui ne laissoit voir que de l'esprit ; il l'admira ; mais il n'en fut guère content et il ne répliqua par ces quatre vers :

Vous n'écrivez que pour écrire ;
C'est pour vous un amusement ;
Moi qui vous aime tendrement ;
Je n'écris que pour vous le dire.

This quatrain has seemed of sufficient merit to be included in Quitard's *Anthologie de l'Amour*. The biographer is at

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre*, XIII, 84.

2. Paris, 1901, III, 486-88.

3. Paris, 1680, 3 parts, in-12.

4. La Chèvre : *Bibl. des Recueils*, Paris, 1901, III, 209-10.

5. La Porte et Champfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, Paris, 1775, III, 408-10.

fault in representing M^{lle} Bernard as a « jolie Gasconne », for she was born at Rouen in 1662, of a Protestant family, and was the niece of Corneille and a cousin of Fontenelle who aided her in her work. She came early to Paris where she moved in the best society, winning the esteem of Madame de Sévigné, of Madame de Coulanges, and the friendship of the chancellor, M. de Pontchartrain. She became converted to the Roman church in 1685 whereupon she was much favored by Madame de Maintenon. Besides poetry she wrote several novels : *Frédéric de Sicile* (1680), ascribed to her by *La France Protestante* and which is thought to be by Pradon ; *Eléonore d'Yvrée* (1687) ; *Le Comte d'Amboise* (1689) ; *Inès de Cordoue* (1696) ; and two tragedies, *Léodamie* (1690) and *Brutus* (1696), in five acts and verse ¹. The fact that she was a compatriot of Pradon and a niece of Corneille throws an interesting light upon the society in which Pradon moved. Born himself at Rouen and favoring in his writings the dramatic method of Corneille, while moving in a circle where Corneille's work was greatly admired, it is probable that he met M^{lle} Bernard in the salons frequented by her uncle.

Biographers say that Pradon's occasional verse has been lost. In addition to the few lines addressed to the Duc de Montausier in the preface to *Pirame*, the following examples have until recently been overlooked by all historians. Although of little value they found their way into an eighteenth century collection of fugitive verse :

CONTRE UN FILOU

Colin, à ce qu'on dit, trois Archers inhumains
T'ayant pris à l'écart, faisoient mal tes affaires ;
Mais tu t'es finement dérobé de leurs mains ;
C'est le moindre larcin qu'on t'ait jamais vu faire.

~~~~~  
Faut-il être étonné qu'à la jeune Isabelle,  
Malgré tout ton esprit, tu plaises moins que moi :

1. La Chèvre : *Bibl. des Recueils*, Paris, 1904, III, 209-10.



Tu ne l'entretiens que de toi ;  
Et je ne l'entretiens que d'elle <sup>1</sup>.

The following epigram was directed by Pradon against the poet Gacon who had attacked him in his *Satires* :

Fade louangeur d'Arlequin,  
Que tu prônes en ton mauvais Livre,  
Et qui t'a donné du pain,  
A présent que sans luy tu composes pour vivre,  
G..... tu vas mourir de faim <sup>2</sup>.

Pradon lived but a short time after the production of his *Scipion l'Africain*. The *Mercure Galant* for January 1698 under the caption « Morts » announces : « M. Pradon. Il étoit de Rouen, et nous a donné plusieurs pièces de théâtre, et entr'autres *Pyrame et Thisbé*, et *Regulus*, qui ont paru avec beaucoup de succès <sup>3</sup>. In a post-script to a letter from Bourdelot to the abbé Nicaise at Dijon, January 15th, 1698, we find « Pradon mourut hier, les cartes à la main » <sup>4</sup>. His death was attributed to apoplexy <sup>5</sup>. The following epitaph seems to have been composed during his life-time :

Cy git le Poète Pradon,  
Qui durant quarante ans, d'une ardeur sans pareille,  
Fit à la barbe d'Apollon,  
Le même métier que Corneille <sup>6</sup>.

1. Gustave vans Roosbroeck : *Notes on Pradon, Modern Language Notes*, vol. XXXV, 5 may, 1920, p. 312. *Nouvelle Bibliothèque de Société Londres et Paris, chez Delalain, rue St.-Jacques*, 1782, p. 104.

2. Gacon : *Le Poète sans fard*, Libreville (Paris), 1693, p. 199. See also p. 200.

3. *Mercure Galant*, janv. 1698, p. 268.

4. Jal : *Dict. critique*, Paris, 1867, p. 998.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XIII, 77, note.

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## CHAPTER II

### LITERARY CONTROVERSIES.

Coming to Paris from a provincial *milieu* where Corneille was still admired, Pradon dedicated his first tragedy to Montausier at whose home he perhaps took up his abode. Here he certainly met all those social favorites whose verses were applauded by a *précieuse* society. To these staunch supporters of Corneille the advent of a young writer from Rouen interested in the stage and possibly capable of pleasing the public was an incident that might be used to good advantage against Racine. Corneille was failing ; Racine had already written the greater number of his tragedies ; Boileau was continuing his war against the most favored writers ; and the salons were changing with the loss of the old gallant and *précieux* spirit. The older party would naturally favor a young writer like Pradon. His *Pirame et Thisbé* bid fair to advance their candidate in popular favor. In his preface Pradon wrote : « Elle a eu le bonheur de plaire ; et c'est la première Règle du Théâtre, et celle à qui l'on doit plutôt s'attacher, qu'à toutes les règles de la Poétique d'Aristote ». The frères Parfaict have thus summed up the public feeling at this time : « Ce grand succès n'est dû qu'à certaines circonstances. L'indulgence ordinaire qu'on a pour les nouveaux Auteurs, et la brigue des ennemis de M. Racine, qui ne cherchoient qu'à lui trouver un Antagoniste, firent la fortune de M. Pradon » <sup>1</sup>.

1. Frères Parfaict : *Histoire du Théâtre français*, XI, 349.

Pradon must certainly have heard of Racine's success before he came to Paris in 1674. He was by temperament and from environment an admirer of Corneille so that his début in Corneille's manner was to be expected. His defense of the character of Bélus in *Pirame et Thisbé* is an argument à la Corneille, while the preface to *Tamerlan* outlines in clearer fashion his position : « J'ai fait un honnête homme de Tamerlan contre l'opinion de certaines gens qui vouloient qu'il fût tout à fait brutal, et qu'il fit mourir jusques aux Sardes. J'ai tâché d'apporter un tempérament à sa férocité naturelle, et d'y mêler un caractère de grandeur et de générosité, qui est fondé dans l'Histoire, puisqu'il refusa l'Empire des Grecs, et qu'il a été un des plus grands Hommes du Monde »<sup>1</sup>. Herein lies much of the dramatic reasoning of Corneille's followers. Pradon sought to make his hero first an « honnête homme », and then to add to the character something of « grandeur » and of generosity that would draw popular favor. Historical facts came last, necessary supports to the work.

By the time of *Tamerlan* the poet was well aware that he worked against opposition. Nor were his opponents idle, for they had seen a new antagonist in Pradon. In his prefaces he continually complains that certain persons were attempting to stifle the play or lessen its chances for success :

Si Thisbé n'avoit pas été si loin, peut-être qu'on eût laissé un libre cours à Tamerlan, et qu'on ne l'eût pas étouffé (comme on a fait) dans le plus fort de son succès... Après cela je dois être plus que content, et me mettre fort peu en peine, lorsqu'elle a été universellement approuvée de tous les honnêtes gens de la malice et du chagrin de quelques particuliers. D'ailleurs, s'ils faisoient réflexion sur plusieurs de leurs Pièces, ils verroient, qu'ils sont eux-mêmes encore moins scrupuleux sur des imitations plus fortes et on pourroit leur faire connoître qu'ils souviennent aussi bien des Modernes que des Anciens, et qu'ils possèdent avec autant d'avantage les beautés de Tristan, de Mairet et de Rotrou que celles d'Horace, de Sophocle et d'Euripide<sup>2</sup>.

1. Preface of *Tamerlan*.

2. *Ibid.*



Subligny, who was of Pradon's circle, in discussing the early withdrawal of *Tamerlan* says : « Je ne veux point examiner si la brusque fierté de Tamerlan doit sa prompte chute aux brigues indignes de M. Racine, ou au défaut de sa propre conduite ». <sup>1</sup> This criticism indicates to what party these « particuliers » belonged, for Subligny evidently considered Racine the enemy of Pradon, and he would probably have added Boileau. Was it then the actions of his critics that urged Pradon to come forth into the open and match wits with Racine, or was it upon the advice and council of the circle to which he belonged ? Historians have been at variance on his motives for competing with Racine, although most of them have been willing to attribute the poet's action to his arrogance. In attempting to pass judgment on the quarrel of the *Phèdres*, one historian leans to the side of Pradon : « Mais à juger la cause avec impartialité, on est forcé de reconnaître qu'il a été aux prises avec une cabale cruelle, et qu'il avoit assez de talent pour n'être pas tué par le ridicule. Bien au contraire, des esprits distingués et même délicats se déclarèrent pour lui, et il put balancer le succès de son rival » <sup>2</sup>. Another critic sees Pradon influenced by an ambitious group of clever schemers : « Die niedrigen Umtriebe die Racine's Feinde gegen die *Iphigénie* ins Werk gesetzt hatten, wiederholten sich in höherem Mass gegen das folgende Stück des Dicters, seine *Phèdre* » <sup>3</sup>. Jal, likewise, is of the opinion that the partisans had more to do with the matter than Pradon : « Une coterie de précieuses et de beaux esprits l'oppose à Racine, l'adopte, cabale pour assurer le succès de ses ouvrages, en fait un homme enfin, un héros, que sais-je » <sup>4</sup>. Subligny,

1. Subligny : *Dissertation sur les tragédies de Phèdre et Hippolyte*, imprimée à Paris, 1677, in-12 (*Recueil de Diss. sur plusieurs tragédies de Corneille et Racine*, par Granet, II, 351-414, Paris, 1740, in-12, dissertation attributed to Subligny).

2. *Bibliothèque dramatique de M. de Soleinne*, Paris, 1844, II, 23, 24.

3. Lotheisen : *Geschichte der Lit. des 17 Jahrhunderts*, Wien, 1883, band IV, ch. iv, p. 178-180.

4. Jal : *Dictionnaire critique de Biographie et d'Histoire*, Paris, 1867, p. 998.

who was probably a party to the cabal of the Duchesse de Bouillon, writes more in favor of Racine. His *Dissertation* on the two *Phèdres* gives Pradon little praise : « M. Racine avoit pris (says Subligny) « la peine de l'accomoder à notre scène, et que M. Pradon avoit eu l'audace de la doubler, sans considérer la haute réputation que s'est acquise dans ces sortes d'ouvrages un si grand homme..., laissant donc à part les raisons que ce nouvel Auteur étranger à la Cour, appuyé de fort peu d'amis, et connu du Peuple seulement par le succès d'une Pièce et le naufrage d'une autre, eut d'attaquer cet illustre génie, favorisé des Puissances, admiré du Peuple, et approuvé des Sçavans » <sup>1</sup>.

M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières, daughter of the celebrated Madame Des Houlières, at whose home were concocted many of the attacks against Racine, is of the opinion that Pradon of his own volition entered into competition with the rival : « Dans le temps que M. Racine faisait des tragédies, Pradon en faisait aussi. Quoique M. Racine fût bien au-dessus de Pradon, il ne le laissait pas de le regarder comme une espèce de concurrent, surtout quand il sut que Pradon composait en même temps que lui sa tragédie de *Phèdre* par émulation... » <sup>2</sup> The frères Parfaict were of the same opinion : « Pradon (fier de quelques succès que la cabale avoit procuré à ses premières tragédies) composa sa *Phèdre* » <sup>3</sup>.

The truculent preface that Pradon affixed to the first edition of *Phèdre et Hippolyte* seems to bear out this contention. This preface is a curious summing up of past grievances and an attempt to justify his ridiculous position. The contentions have so much bearing upon the question of his part in the cabal that the preface is here given at length :

A l'arrivée d'un second Hippolyte à Paris, toute la République des lettres fut émue ; quelques poètes traitèrent cette entreprise de témérité, ironie et de crime de lèse-majesté poétique : surtout

1. Subligny : *Dissertation sur les deux Phèdres*.

2. Sainte-Beuve : *Causeries*, XIII, 386-89.

3. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 2.



La cabale en palit et vit en frémissant  
Un second Hippolyte à sa barbe naissant.

Mais les honnêtes gens applaudirent fort à ce dessein : ils disoient hautement qu'Euripide, qui est l'original de cet ouvrage, n'auroit jamais fait de procès à Sénèque pour avoir traité son sujet, ni Sénèque à Garnier ni Garnier à Gilbert. Ainsi j'avoue franchement que ça n'a point été un effet du hasard qui m'a fait rencontrer avec M. Racine mais un pure effet de mon choix...

Il seroit même à souhaiter pour le divertissement en public que plusieurs auteurs se rencontrassent quelquefois dans les mêmes sujets pour faire naître cette noble émulation qui est la cause des plus beaux ouvrages. Mais quelques auteurs intéressés n'ont pas été de ce sentiment, ils se sont érigés en régent du Parnasse, ou plutôt en tyrans, et ils ont établi entre eux (en étouffant les ouvrages des autres ou en les empêchant de paraître) cette maxime des *Femmes Savantes* de Molière :

Et nul n'aura d'esprit hors nous et nos amis.

En vérité, n'en déplaise à ces grands hommes, on me permettra de leur dire, en passant, que leur procédé et leur manière sont fort éloignés de ce sublime qu'ils tâchent d'attraper dans leurs ouvrages. Pour moi, j'ai toujours cru qu'on devoit avoir ce caractère dans ses mœurs avant que de le faire paroître dans ses écrits, et que l'on devoit être bien moins avide de la qualité de bon auteur que de celle d'honnête homme que l'on me verra toujours préférer à tout le sublime de Longin. Ces anciens Grecs dont le style est si sublime et qui nous doivent servir de modèles, n'auroient point empêché dans Athènes les meilleures actrices d'une troupe de jouer en premier rôle comme nos modernes l'ont fait à Paris au théâtre de Guénégaud. C'est ce que le public a vu avec indignation et avec mépris, mais il n'en a assez vengé et je lui ai trop d'obligation pour différer plus longtemps à l'avertir de ce qui se trame contre lui — c'est une trop plaisante nouvelle pour n'en pas réjouir mon lecteur. Il ne pourra pas apprendre sans rire que ces messieurs veulent ôter la liberté aux auteurs de faire des pièces de théâtre, aux comédiens de les jouer, aux libraires de les imprimer, et même au public d'enjoyer <sup>1</sup>.

In spite of his statement that he entered into competition deliberately with Racine in the choice of subject, it seems more probable that this plan arose in the minds of the coterie wherein he moved. There is nothing in his earlier prefaces to suggest the egotism shown in this one. Subligny states that

1. Preface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.



Pradon, at the time of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, was a new author, known to the court and the public only by one success and a dubious failure. No young author with such scanty success to his credit would willingly choose a subject which he knew was being treated by the most favored dramatist of the day, one who already had six important tragedies to his credit, unless urged to do so from motives other than those of pride. He would know too well that in any such competition fortune favored the older poet. Subligny's criticism has too much the air of currying favor with Racine to make his opinion reliable, and M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières would be well content to shift to Pradon the blame for her mother's bad taste. When one becomes the dupe of clever tricksters, from self-defense one must play up to the part. And so, even in his dedication to the Duchesse de Bouillon, Pradon passes gaily over the cabal of his own party to an attack upon his opponents for the very thing in which he has been involved :

« Ne vous étonnez pas, Madame, s'il [Hippolyte] vous paroît dépouillé de cette fierté farouche et de cette insensibilité qui lui estoit si naturelle mais en auroit-il pu conserver auprès des charmes de V. Altesse ? Enfin si les Anciens nous l'ont dépeint comme il a esté dans Trézène, du moins il paroitra comme il a dû estre à Paris ; et n'en déplaist à toute l'Antiquité, ce jeune Héros auroit mauvaise grâce de venir tout hérissé des épines de Grec, dans une Cour aussi galante que la nostre. Ce n'est pas, Madame, que V. Altesse ne pénètre admirablement toutes les beautés des Anciens. Outre la témérité de sa personne et l'éclat de son Rang, Elle possède encore au-dessus de celles de sexe, des avantages plus solides du caste de l'Esprit puisque (si je l'ose dire) elle sçait puiser dans leurs sources les beautés d'Horace et d'Ovide, et des plus célèbres Auteurs dont elle nous pourroit donner des leçons. On sçait d'ailleurs Madame, que V. Altesse ne juge jamais des ouvrages par cabale, ou par prévention, mais toujours avec un discernement si juste, accompagné de tant de pénétration et de délicatesse, et dans une si grande droiture de raison, qu'elle ne laisse rien à répondre aux plus entestés. Ce sont ces raisons, Madame, qui ont forcé Hippolyte à venir vous rendre ses respects et vous remercier des bontés dont V. Altesse l'a déjà daigné honorer au Théâtre <sup>1</sup>.

1. *Epître of Phèdre et Hippolyte.*

That Racine was working upon a tragedy whose subject was Hippolyte was certainly known to his associates, for in certain circles he frequently read portions of his unfinished works. Bayle, writing from Sedan, October 4th, 1676, to Mintoli at Geneva, says : « M. de Racine travaille à la tragédie d'*Hippolyte* dont on attend un grand succès »<sup>1</sup>. In 1676 Racine wrote to the Père Bouhours asking him to criticize four acts of a tragedy he had written and promising the fifth, « dès que je l'aurai transcrit », suggesting also that he show the play to Père Rapin<sup>2</sup>. The tragedy referred to is evidently *Phèdre* upon which, as Bayle's letter shows, Racine was working in 1676. If Racine was in the habit of reading parts of *Phèdre* to his friends and allowing others to look over the partly finished work in manuscript, the subject matter and method of treatment undoubtedly became more or less known. In a restricted society such as that of Louis' court where the members were in close social contact, such a matter as the treatment in Racine's new work would be welcome news to his opponents. Certain habitués of the salons Bouillon and Des Houlières may have been present at a reading of the *Phèdre* or in some way have become conversant with its contents, and information thus acquired would be imparted to Pradon. Gazier so explains Bayle's reference to the new tragedy *Hippolyte* :

Lorsque la tragédie de *Phèdre* n'avait pas encore paru, et que cependant on commençait déjà à s'occuper dans le public de l'imitation de l'*Hippolyte* d'Euripide, à laquelle Racine travaillait, c'était, nous l'avons vu, sous ce même titre d'*Hippolyte* choisi par le poète grec que Bayle avait entendu parler de la nouvelle pièce... Racine, sentant bien qu'il devait lui imposer un autre nom, adopta, comme Pradon le fit à son imitation, celui de *Phèdre et Hyppolite*<sup>3</sup>.

In his preface Pradon again makes the charge, as in the preface to *Tamerlan*, that certain persons had attempted to

1. *Œuvres diverses de Bayle*, La Haye, 1731, IV, 567.

2. Paul Mesnard : *Œuvres de Racine*, VI, 528-9, letter 45.

3. Augustin Gazier : *Racine et le théâtre français*, *Revue hebdomadaire des Cours et Conférences*, 16, 1, 1907-8.



prevent the performance. Their method, he declares, was to discourage the better actresses from essaying the role of *Phèdre*. It would appear that an appeal was made to the king, but Louis, to his credit, did not withhold from the rival what he had permitted to Racine<sup>1</sup>. Brossette tells us that Racine produced his *Phèdre* at this time contrary to the advice of Boileau who feared just such a quarrel<sup>2</sup>. As for Pradon's claim that his enemies prevented the better actresses from undertaking the role of *Phèdre* : « Rien ne pouvoit arriver de plus favorable à M. Pradon » (say the frères Parfaict), « que de se trouver en concurrence avec M. Racine. Cependant ce bonheur auroit peu duré, si ce dernier, et ses amis, allarmés mal à propos, n'eussent cherché à faire tomber la pièce nouvelle par une brigue tout à fait indigne d'eux, et qui ne servit qu'à donner pendant deux ou trois mois une espèce de réputation à cet audacieux rival »<sup>3</sup>. If Racine's party tried to hinder the production, it is natural that Pradon should suspect his rival of influencing the leading actresses.

The history of the cabal carried on by Madame de Bouillon with the aid of her brother, the Duc de Nevers, and Madame Des Houlières is so well known that a hasty account of it will suffice here. The furor it created can be well seen in the *Mercure Galant* which devoted an article of some length to it and in Boileau's *Epître VII* to Racine beginning :

Que tu sais bien, Racine, à l'aide d'un aëteur,  
Emouvoir, étonner, ravir un spectateur !

Racine's success was ascribed by his enemies to the skill of the actors : « Les partisans de Corneille attribuoient le succès des pièces de son rival au jeu des acteurs, auxquels il communiquoit, par ses leçons, le grand talent qu'il avoit pour la déclamation, et Saint-Évremond étoit du nombre

1. Pradon : *Nouvelles Remarques*, etc., p. 70.

2. A. Laverdet : *Correspondance entre Boileau Despréaux et Brossette*, Paris, 1858, appendix : *Mémoire de Brossette sur Boileau*, p. 562.

3. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 46.



de ceux qui rejettoient sur les comédiens une partie de la gloire d'Andromaque » <sup>1</sup>. The first skirmish in the war of the *Phèdres* is usually attributed to the Duchesse de Bouillon. She, with the Duc de Nevers, Madame Des Houlières, and others of her salon, let herself become a party to a rather petty affair. There are two versions of this cabale, the first of which is found in the *Mémoires* of Louis Racine <sup>2</sup>, the other in Sainte-Beuve's account of a conversation which Brossette had in 1711 with M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières, the daughter of the celebrated Madame Des Houlières. Louis Racine says that Madame du Bouillon and her coterie « s'avisèrent d'une ruse qui leur coûta, dit Boileau, 15.000 livres ; ils retinrent les premières loges pour les six premières représentations de l'une et l'autre pièce et par conséquent ces loges étaient vides et remplies comme ils voulaient. Les six premières représentations furent si favorables à la *Phèdre* de Pradon et si contraires à celle de mon père qu'il était près de craindre pour elle une véritable chute, dont les bons ouvrages sont quelquefois menacés... » Pradon's tragedy thus received the support of a large and favorable audience, while at the rival theatre popular favor was so lacking that the rumor of failure for Racine gained ground.

In the story given Brossette by M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières it would appear that the cabale of the Duchesse de Bouillon arose from her anger at an insulting sonnet against her brother, the Duc de Nevers, and that only after the appearance of the disagreeable verses did she decide to buy up the seats at both theatres. M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières' account to Brossette while he was at Lyon runs as follows :

« Dans le temps que Racine faisait des tragédies, Pradon en faisait aussi. Quoique M. Racine fut très au-dessus de Pradon, il ne laissait pas de le regarder comme une espèce de concurrent, surtout quand il sut que Pradon composait en même temps que lui

1. Louis Racine : *Remarques sur les tragédies de Jean Racine*, Amsterdam, 1752, I, 127.

2. Paul Mesnard : *Œuvres de Racine*, édition *Grands Écrivains*, I, 261-263.

la tragédie de *Phèdre* par émulation et qu'il avait doublé celle de M. Racine sur le récit que Pradon en avait ouï faire. D'ailleurs, Pradon avait fait une critique des poésies de M. Despréaux. Voyez par combien de titres Pradon avait mérité l'animosité de ces Messieurs.

Pradon venait souvent chez ma mère, pour laquelle il avait beaucoup de considération et au goût de qui il avait assez de confiance pour la venir consulter sur les ouvrages qu'il faisait...

Ma mère voulut voir la première représentation de la *Phèdre* de Racine : elle envoya retenir une loge, quelques jours d'avance, à l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, mais Champmeslé (le mari de la célèbre actrice), qui avait soin des loges, fit toujours dire aux gens qui venaient de la part de M<sup>me</sup> Des Hôulières, qu'il n'y avait pas de places et que toutes les loges étaient retenues. Ma mère sentit l'affectation de ce refus et fut piquée : « J'irai pourtant, en dépit d'eux, dit-elle, et je verrai la première représentation ». Quand l'heure de la comédie fut venue, elle se mit en négligé avec une de ses amies qui prit des billets. Elle se cacha de tout son mieux sous une grande coiffe de taffetas, et au lieu d'entrer par la porte du théâtre, comme elle avait coutume de le faire, elle entra par la porte des loges et s'alla placer au fond des secondes loges, car toutes les autres étaient remplies.

Elle vit la pièce qui fut jouée en perfection. Elle revint souper chez elle, au logis, avec cinq ou six personnes du nombre desquelles était Pradon. Chacun dit son sentiment sur la tragédie, et on se trouva plus disposé à la critique qu'à la louange. Ce fut pendant ce même souper, que ma mère fit ce fameux sonnet :

Dans un palais doré, *Phèdre*, tremblante et blême...

Après une infinité de conjectures, que ces Messieurs (Racine et Despréaux) hasardèrent, leur soupçon s'arrêta principalement sur M. le duc de Nevers, qu'ils avaient vu à la représentation ; car pour Pradon, franchement, ils ne lui firent pas l'honneur de le croire capable d'une critique si maligne et si ingénieuse.

Ils s'arrêtèrent donc à M. le duc de Nevers et dès le même jour ou le lendemain, M. Racine et M. Despréaux, avec le chevalier de Nantouillet, tournèrent ce sonnet contre M. de Nevers sur les mêmes rimes.

Cette réplique fit un bruit terrible à la Cour et chacun prit parti pour ou contre. La cabale de M<sup>me</sup> de Bouillon et du duc de Nevers, laquelle favorisait Pradon contre M. Racine, fit de grandes clameurs : « Quoi, disaient-ils, le premier sonnet, de qui il puisse être, n'attaque que la pièce de Racine, et Racine dans le sonnet doublé, s'en prend au duc de Nevers lui-même, qui n'y a aucune part. »

Le duc de Nevers était plus curieux que les autres de savoir qui était l'auteur du sonnet qu'on lui attribuait. Pradon, qui l'avait vu



faire, eut pourtant assez de force et de discrétion pour ne pas nommer M<sup>me</sup> Des Houlières ; et l'on a été dix ou douze ans sans savoir que c'est elle qui l'avait composé. Pradon lui-même, que l'on en soupçonnait aussi, n'était peut-être pas fâché d'un soupçon qui lui faisait honneur. Quoi qu'il en soit, il ne dit point ce qu'il savait là-dessus <sup>1</sup>. »

Upon the strength of M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières', account Sainte-Beuve rejected the traditional story : « Il n'est pas du tout exact de dire, je le crois, que la duchesse de Bouillon ait d'emblée louée la salle pour faire tomber la pièce » <sup>2</sup>. He also believed that « Racine, sentant qu'il avait des ennemis ne fit pas autrement que de grands auteurs ne l'ont fait de nos jours : il prit bonne partie de la salle pour la première représentation, faisant refuser des places aux suspects envers qui il osait se le permettre », and, as to the Duchesse de Bouillon, « ce fut sans doute pour prendre sa revanche au sonnet qu'elle loua la salle aux représentations suivantes. On sait le reste : la guerre était déclarée ». A recent writer <sup>3</sup>, weighing the evidence in these two versions, rejects the latter account and accepts the one of Louis Racine as the true history of the affair on the ground that the son of Jean Racine supported by the testimony of Boileau is a more reliable source of information than the daughter of Madame Des Houlières, at the time a girl of fifteen. He argues further that if Madame de Bouillon bought up the seats after the first performance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne instead of for the first six performances, it is not likely that she would have interfered much with the success of the tragedy. To be effective her plan would have had to embrace the first performance, for a seventeenth century audience would not have been deceived by any sudden falling off in attendance after the public applause of the first production. Furthermore, M<sup>lle</sup> Des

1. Sainte-Beuve : *Causeries du Lundi*. — *Les Nièces de Mazarin*, XIII, 386-89.

2. *Ibid.*

3. G. Mongrédien : *Une vieille querelle : Racine et Pradon*. *Revue bleue*, jan. 15, 1921, p. 57-58.



Houlières, in assigning the second sonnet as the reason for the cabale, gives to the Duchesse de Bouillon a cause for her action and at the same time absolves her mother from any attempt to destroy Racine's masterpiece. She states, besides, that Pradon had published a satire against the writings of Boileau, but Pradon's diatribes did not appear until some fifteen years later. The sonnet against de Nevers she ascribes to Racine and Boileau but Brossette has told us they had nothing to do with the affair. These two inaccuracies in the eyes of her critic condemn her story as unreliable and inaccurate.

The arguments advanced to disprove her are convincing to a certain degree. It does seem that Madame de Bouillon's plan to buy up the seats after the first performances, if this be the correct story, was rather doubtful generalship, but it is not so improbable as our critic thinks. It is conceivable that, even if she did not control the seats at the first six performances, her action might have deprived the play of a certain number of attendants during the days she paid for without leaving an entirely empty theatre; and that the reduced number made Racine anxious about the success of the tragedy after its first brilliant beginning. In a society as restricted as that of Louis' reign, in which so much attention was given to social acclaim, the withdrawal of support in any great amount from the Hôtel de Bourgogne, even after the first six performances, would be harmful to the tragedy. Society and the court might gain the impression that the piece had failed to please the social leaders.

Louis Racine, though he should be well-informed about his father, has not proven himself an infallible historian, as the preface to the *Histoire du Théâtre français* by the brothers Parfaict shows. Our critic gives as one of his reasons for rejecting the story of M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières that she contradicts Brossette's statement about the authorship of the sonnet against de Nevers. Yet this whole tale of hers comes to us from Brossette in his own words. Why did he not correct

the error or reject the entire matter, for he had always been in friendly correspondence with Boileau ?

It seems strange, too, that Champmeslé, the manager of the troupe and the husband of the leading actress, should have allowed his seats to be sold « en bloc » or in such a way as to have them fall into the hands of the hostile camp. Surely he was not unaware of the rival play soon to appear and of its supporters. To dispose of his seats in such a manner was to jeopardise future business. According to M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières he was quite willing to exclude the « suspects » upon the advice of Racine, and he seems to have known who they were. The affair remains as much in the air as ever. The two accounts, the one given by Louis Racine, the other by M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières and accepted by Sainte-Beuve, stand thus side by side with the arguments in both cases. Perhaps some day we shall know definitely just which performances Madame de Bouillon influenced and whether her plan was premeditated or the result of wounded family pride.

M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières states that after the performance her mother returned home accompanied by friends among whom was Pradon and that at the table this sonnet was composed :

Dans un fauteuil doré, Phèdre tremblante et blême,  
Dit des vers où d'abord personne n'entend rien.  
Sa nourrice lui fait un sermon fort chrétien,  
Contre l'affreux dessein d'attenter sur soi-même.

Hippolyte la hait presque autant qu'elle l'aime ;  
Rien ne change son cœur ni son chaste maintien.  
La nourrice l'accuse ; elle s'en punit bien ;  
Thésée a pour son fils une rigueur extrême.

Une grosse Aricie <sup>1</sup>, au teint rouge, aux crins blonds,  
N'est là que pour montrer deux énormes tétons,  
Que, malgré sa froideur, Hippolyte idolâtre.

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 4, note. Des Maizeaux ascribed the role of Aricie to M<sup>lle</sup> Des Ceillels. The frères Parfaict point out that it was impossible for her to play the role as she died in 1670 : — « Ainsi il faut rendre ce portrait satirique de l'actrice qui fit alors le rôle d'Aricie à M<sup>lle</sup> d'Ennebaut qui étoit blonde et grasse mais très jolie ».

Il meurt enfin, traîné par ses coursiers ingrats ;  
Et, Phèdre, après avoir pris de la mort aux-rats,  
Vient, en se confessant, mourir sur le théâtre <sup>1</sup>.

This sonnet, in whose composition quite likely all the guests took part, was circulated the next morning among the wits of society and became a « pièce de scandale ». At about eleven o'clock the abbé Tallemant des Réaux, thinking he brought a novelty of great interest, arrived at the hôtel of Madame Des Houlières with the sonnet which he claimed was his work <sup>2</sup>. The poem naturally came to the attention of Racine and Boileau who considered de Nevers the author. Another sonnet appeared that day on the same rhymes against de Nevers who promptly put it down as the work of Racine and Boileau. He was highly enraged at the insulting allusion it contained to his sister, the Duchesse de Mazarin. The sonnet runs :

Dans un palais doré, Damon, jaloux et blême,  
Fait des vers, où jamais personne n'entend rien,  
Il n'est ni courtisan, ni guerrier, ni chrétien ;  
Et souvent, pour rimer, il s'enferme lui-même.

La Muse, par malheur, le hait autant qu'il l'aime ;  
Il a d'un franc Poète et l'air et le maintien.  
Il veut juger de tout, et n'en juge pas bien,  
Il a pour le Phébus une tendresse extrême.

Une sœur vagabonde, aux crins plus noirs que blonds,  
Va par tout l'univers promener deux tétos,  
Dont, malgré son pays, Damon est idolâtre.

Il se tue à rimer pour des lecteurs ingrats ;  
L'Enéide, à son goût, est de la mort-aux-rats,  
Et, selon lui, Pradon est le Roi du Théâtre <sup>3</sup>.

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 3-4 ; La Porte et Champfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, II, 59-62.

2. Sainte-Beuve : *Les Nièces de Mazarin, Causeries du Lundi*, XIII, 388. « L'abbé Tallemant qui était appelé le Père Tallemant, pour le distinguer d'un autre abbé Tallemant, tous deux de l'Académie française » (M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières). Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 4, note. — « François Tallemant des Réaux, abbé de Val-Chrétien. On l'appeloit l'ainé pour le distinguer de Paul Tallemant, son cousin, qui étoit aussi ecclésiastique. »

3. La Porte et Chamfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, II, 59-62 ; Frères Par-



Both Racine and Boileau, whom de Nevers accused, hastened to deny the authorship of the sonnet, but the duke, unappeased, let it be known that he would have them assassinated. Meanwhile he replied to the insult by a sonnet of his own making :

Racine et Despréaux, l'air triste et le teint blême,  
Viennent demander grâce, et ne confessent rien.  
Il faut leur pardonner, parce qu'on est Chrétien ;  
Mais on sçait ce qu'on doit au Public, à soi-même.

Damon, pour l'intérêt de cette sœur qu'il aime,  
Doit de ces scélérats châtier le maintien,  
Car il serait blâmé de tous les gens de bien,  
S'il ne punissait pas leur insolence extrême.

Ce fut une furie, aux crins plus noirs que blonds,  
Qui leur pressa du pus de ses affreux tétons,  
Ce Sonnet qu'en secret leur cabale idolâtre.

Vous en serez punis, Satyriques ingrats ;  
Non pas en trahison, avec la mort-aux-rats  
Mais à coups de bâton donnés en plein théâtre <sup>1</sup>.

To Racine and Boileau the affair began to look menacing, although they were still proclaiming their innocence. Henri Jules de Bourbon, son of the great Condé, calmed their fears by telling them : « Si vous n'avez pas fait le sonnet, venez à l'Hôtel de Condé, où M. le Prince sçaura bien vous garantir de ces menaces, puisque vous êtes innocents ; et si vous l'avez fait, venez aussi à l'Hôtel de Condé ; et M. le Prince vous prendra de même sous sa protection, parce que le sonnet est très plaisant et plein d'esprit » <sup>2</sup>. Later another sonnet appeared on the same rhymes, the work of Sanlecque, of which only the first quatrain is preserved to us in the *Supplément de Moréri* :

faict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 5-6. (For the variants to this and the succeeding sonnets see *Revue bleue*, jan. 15, 1921, p. 55-56. — G. Mongredien : *Une vieille querelle : Racine et Pradon*).

1. La Porte et Chamfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, II, 59-62 ; also, Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 7.

2. *Ibid.*

Dans un coin de Paris, Boileau tremblant et blême,  
Fut hier bien frotté quoiqu'il n'en dise rien.  
Voilà ce qu'a produit son zèle peu chrétien,  
Disant du mal d'autrui, on s'en fait à soi-même <sup>1</sup>.

A complete version of this sonnet runs as follows :

A l'aspect d'un bâton, Boileau tremblant et blême,  
Criait comme un damné : Ne précipitez rien.  
Quoi ! sans confession assommer un chrétien !  
Ah ! donnez-moi le temps de rentrer en moi-même.

A ces mots, l'insolent qu'on hait plus qu'on ne l'aime,  
Fit voir tant de bassesse en son lâche maintien,  
Pour un homme sans cœur se découvrant si bien  
Qu'on eût presque pitié de sa faiblesse extrême.

Mais le ressouvenir d'Iris aux cheveux blonds  
Dont il a maltraité les aimables tétons  
Ayant frappé au cœur l'amant qui l'idolâtre,

Dans l'ardeur de punir ces sentiments ingrats,  
D'un bâton qui servait d'enseigne à mort-aux-rats  
Il fit de sa personne un sujet de théâtre <sup>2</sup>.

It was at this point that « le Grand Condé » announced he would resent any attack upon his friends <sup>3</sup>. During the month of October Racine and Boileau were chosen to write the history of Louis' reign <sup>4</sup>. The Duc de Nevers probably thought it unwise to proceed against two men favored by the sovereign so the matter was dropped. According to M<sup>lle</sup> Des Houlières the author of the original sonnet remained unknown for some ten or twelve years <sup>5</sup>. Racine later denied to the Duc de Nevers having any part in making the sonnet attributed to him. The duke, on his part, maintained that he had

1. G. Mongredien : *Une vieille querelle : Racine et Pradon*, *Revue bleue*, jan. 15, 1921, p. 56.

2. *Ibid.* : see also Cizeron-Rival : *Récréations littéraires*, p. 73 (1767).

3. Paul Mesnard : *Œuvres de Racine*, III, 260.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Sainte-Beuve : *Causeries du Lundi : Les Nièces de Mazarin*, XIII, 387-8 ; Goujet : *Bibliothèque française*, Paris, 1756, XVIII, 403 : « On ignore l'auteur pendant quelque temps. »

had no part in the first one, at which Racine remarked, « qu'apparemment celui qui avait fait le premier sonnet, avait aussi fait le second » <sup>1</sup>. Nicéron claims that Boileau and Racine at a later time stated this sonnet was the combined effort of the Chevalier de Nantouillet, the Comte de Fièsque, the Marquis de Manicamp, the Marquis d'Effait, and M. de Guilleragues <sup>2</sup>. Louis Racine also denies that either Boileau or his father had anything to do with it <sup>3</sup>.

Pradon himself does not appear to any extent in this dispute. Although some may have suspected him of writing the sonnet or at least of having been a party to its composition, he does not appear in the quarrel, which concerned itself with the leaders of the opposing forces. Knowing what part Madame Des Houlières had in the affair, he maintained a creditable silent. The war of the sonnets was but an after-glow of the quarrel of the *Phèdres*, but Pradon's reputation had been so affected that not even the success of *Regulus*, some eleven years later, could retrieve the damage. All the bitterness and rancor of his opponents fell upon him, while the culprits of the sonnet were forgotten. Boileau lost no chance to attack him. Even today in the minds of most students of the period his name recalls a ridiculous play of some three months labor set up to rival Racine's masterpiece and nothing more. By this one act he lost his cause.

The quarrel of the *Phèdres* made no change in Pradon's dramatic ideas. If he at times gave the sentiment of love a more prominent place than a strict adherence to the Cornelian manner demanded, that was a tendency of the time. His diatribes against Boileau, his prefaces and epistles extol the greatness of the old master. In his earlier tragedies he struggled to meet the requirements of the Cornelian aesthetics and in his later ones he attempted to adapt his earlier manner to the changed conditions of the public taste.

1. *Ibid.*

2. Nicéron : *Mémoires*, XVIII, 1-31.

3. Paul Mesnard : *Œuvres de Racine*, I, 261.



Il n'y a que la Muse du grand Corneille, qui au jugement de tout le monde, porte et conserve partout des ornemens solides, et n'en déplaît à M. D\*\*\*, il n'y a que l'impression des œuvres de ce grand Homme qui :

De Corneille vieilli, sçait consoler Paris.

Et le Cid, qui a quarante ans sur la tête, paroît, encore moins vieux que plusieurs pièces des plus nouvelles de notre temps <sup>1</sup>.

Such was his feeling for Corneille seven years after *Phèdre*. He returns to the praise of the master in his *Epître en vers* preceding the tragedy of *Regulus*. The verses are not lacking in grace :

Esprit du grand Corneille anime nostre veine,  
Toy, qui toujours seul le maistre de la Scène,  
Dont le sçavoir profond et les nobles écrits  
Touchent toujours les cœurs, enlevant les esprits,  
Tous ces traits immortels en te faisant revivre,  
Nous inspirent l'envie et l'ardeur de te suivre.  
La mort impitoyable éteignant son flambeau  
Tient Melpomène en pleurs aux pieds de son tombeau <sup>2</sup>.

*Regulus* owes its strength in a measure to the Cornelian manner of its conception, for the poet decided to treat his subject after the older style : « J'avoue qu'il y a peu d'amour, mais je n'y en pouvois mettre davantage avec bienséance. Et j'ay fait cette réflexion dans les représentations de *Regulus*, que la grandeur d'âme frappe plus que la tendresse, et que le Spectateur est tombé plus vivement par une grande action qui l'enlève que par un fade amour qui languit, et qui fatigue et l'Auditeur et l'acteur » <sup>3</sup>.

For Racine he had little regard, due to his admiration for Corneille and a dislike for the rival who had been his undoing, the friend of his arch-enemy Boileau. For him Racine was not worth an ounce of Corneille :

1. Prædon : *Nouvelles Remarques*, etc., p. 74.

2. *Epître de Regulus*.

3. Preface of *Regulus*.

Cet Auteur qui ranime Alexandre, Pyrrhus,  
Achille, Bajazet, Hippolyte, Titus,  
Quand pour se dévoiler tous ces grands personnages  
Viennent en Céladons masqués dans ses Ouvrages :  
Mais pour connoître à fond ces chefs-d'œuvre divers,  
Qu'on mette en un creuset Racine et tous ses Vers  
Pourquoi ses Partisans ont tant crié merveille,  
On n'en tiroit pas une once de Corneille  
Si Boileau de Racine embrasse l'intérêt,  
A défendre Boileau Racine est toujours prest,  
Ces Rimeurs faux-filés l'un l'autre se chatouillent,  
Et de leur fade encens tout à tour se barbouillent <sup>1</sup>.

His feeling for Corneille naturally made him sympathetic to all those writers, contemporaries of the Rouen dramatist, whose works were condemned by the Satirist : « J'avoue, Monseigneur, que j'ay esté surpris que de tant d'honnêtes gens qui sont en vie et que M. D\*\*\* a attaquez dans ses Satires, pas un n'ait osé luy répondre, à la réserve de feu M. Desmarets qui luy répliqua fort vivement... Ce n'est pas qu'il n'ait trouvé M. Desmarets en son chemin qui a fait voir une très grande partie de ses fautes, tant de jugement que de construction... M. D\*\*\* ne peut louer qu'il ne satirise en en même temps. Contre M. de Brébeuf qu'il insulte encore en vingt endroits » <sup>2</sup>. He continues his criticism of Boileau and defends his contemporaries : « Il tombe dans la répétition des noms des auteurs qu'il a déjà nommés et poursuit incessamment un plus galant homme que luy, qui a fait des Ouvrages dont il est l'original et au génie duquel nous devons tous les Opéras que nous avons en France et toutes ces jolies et tendres chansonnettes que l'incomparable Monsieur de Lulli a si bien mises en air. En vérité le mérite de cet Auteur qui est si honnête homme est au-dessus de la Satire » <sup>3</sup>... « Jamais Quinault a tant répandu de sucre et de miel dans ses opéras que le grand Racine en a mis dans son *Alexandre*, nous fai-

1. *Le Triomphe de Pradon, Epître à Alexandre*, lines 116-127.

2. *Nouvelles Remarques*, etc., *Epître à M. le Duc de\*\*\**.

3. *Ibid.*

sant du plus grand Héros de l'Antiquité, un freluquet amoureux. »

This animosity toward the two great classicists put him among the authors who, from pique, personal grievance, or, different aesthetic views, saw in Boileau the proud dictator of literary taste, the champion of the ancient civilization to the discredit of the greatness of his own time. The lesser writers of the century considered the works of their contemporaries greater than those of previous ages or reigns. With this so-called modernist tendency the Satirist was in slight accord. Beginning early in the century this movement led, toward its close, to the « *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. It attracted writers of varied ability, bent upon praising their own age, denying the value of old models, and ignorant themselves of the beauties of antiquity. It was to this party that Pradon belonged. In the preface of his first tragedy he announced that : « De plaire, c'est la première Règle du Théâtre, et celle à qui l'on doit plutôt s'attacher, qu'à toutes les règles d'Aristote » <sup>1</sup>. He confessed in his remarks to *Phèdre et Hippolyte* that his Hippolytus was not the young hero of antiquity but a modern type, more suitable to the age <sup>2</sup>. The rough vigor of the ancient models displeased him. He preferred his characters to be « honnêtes hommes », <sup>3</sup> for, he says : « Notre Théâtre ne peut souffrir ce qui a fait autrefois la beautez de celui des anciens. Nos mœurs sont trop douces et trop éloignées de ces mœurs sauvages et barbares. Mais pour conduire Ulysse et Pyrrhus à la catastrophe et pour ADOUCIR leurs caractères, j'ai supposé qu'Ulysse avait conçu un amour secret pour Polixène et Pyrrhus pour Andromaque » <sup>4</sup>. He admired Desmarets, the first seventeenth century champion of the Moderns : « J'avoue, Monseigneur, que j'ay esté surpris que de tant d'honnêtes gens qui sont

1. Preface of *Pirame et Thisbé*.

2. Preface of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

3. Preface of *Tamerlan*.

4. Preface of *La Troade*.



en leur vie et que M. D. a attaquez dans ses Satires, pas un n'ait osé luy répondre à la réserve du feu M. Des Marets qui luy répliqua fort vivement <sup>1</sup>. » He admired this writer's *Clovis* for its poetry « si noble ». It was this same Desmarets who had attacked, earlier in the century, the legends of antiquity in much the same way that Pradon scoffs at them : « Mais nous qui n'avons pas envie d'abandonner la Religion du bon sens et de la raison, pour nous jeter dans l'Idolatrie de l'Antiquité ; nous lui laisserons admirer les belles harangues de Mézence à son cheval, et de Turnus à sa Pique. Nous souffrirons volontiers que Despréaux soit extasié des sublimes comparaisons d'Ajax, et de la mère de Lavinie en sabot fouettée par les petits enfans <sup>2</sup>. » He hastened to aid the women of the salons, supporters of the Moderns, in his *Réponse à la Satire X du Sieur D...*

Boileau was the leader of the opposing faction and Pradon's most out-spoken critic. The poet had a great dislike for this : « Chantre sans vigueur, sans art, sans génie, qui ignore l'harmonie, un mélancholique, un farouche hibou ; faux imitateur d'Horace et de Lucile ; paré de morceaux recousus et d'ornemens usés » <sup>3</sup>. He saw in him only the malicious critic seeking out « quelque misérable Auteur à déchirer » <sup>4</sup>, or the impostor, « exterminateur du menu peuple du Parnasse, qui a tracé de si belles Règles aux Poètes. Ce Style badant, le fléau des petits Auteurs, ce fameux Despréaux qui a eu l'art d'imposer si longtemps avec le plus foible talent du monde quelque nouveauté dans ses manières, ses citations modernes, ses émistiches revez, quelques vers frapans, enfans d'une longue méditation, mal amenés souvent, et plus mal placés, ont d'abord surpris et abusé bien des gens. Il a joui quelque temps de l'approbation de la multitude ; mais après un peu de réflexion on n'a plus crié au miracle, on a ouvert les yeux, on a connu qu'il

1. *Épître dédicatoire, Nouvelles Remarques, etc.*

2. *Le Triomphe de Pradon.*

3. *Ibid, Épître à Alexandre.*

4. *Ibid, Préface.*

étoit homme, et comme tel, capable de faire ses fautes »<sup>1</sup>.

The battle which Pradon thus carried on was of a two-fold nature. Chafing at the continual abuse he received from the satirist and objecting to the severity of classical precept by which his own works and those of his friends were judged, he sought to justify himself and at the same time destroy the authority of the opposing leader by denying his ability, judgment, and taste. He criticised phrase and word usage in a manner often so meticulous that the flimsy pretext barely conceals the underlying jealousy, malice and wounded pride :

J'ay pris vos pensées comme avous avez pris celles d'Horace ; vous voyez que j'ay tâché par là de vous imiter<sup>2</sup>...

Pour l'Histoire de Longin... M. D\*\*\* n'est pas toujours si fier qu'il le paroît et quand il trouve des gens qui luy tiennent tête et qui sont plus savants que luy, il va au devant du coup.

M. Dacier, fort célèbre par la parfaite connaissance qu'il a des Auteurs Grecs et par ses belles et sçavantes traductions avoit écrit contre celle de Longin de M. D\*\*\* ; il le sçeut, il en fut fort allarmé, il fut trouver M. Dacier, conféra avec luy, et enfin par l'entremise de ses amis, il fut arrêté entre eux que M. Dacier ne mettroit que la moitié des remarques qu'il avoit faites sur celles de notre Satirique et quelque adoucissement que l'honnêteté de M. Dacier ait apporté à la chose, il n'a pu se dispenser de mettre en écrivant sur la traduction de M. Despréaux que tantôt il obscurcit, tantôt il ne prend pas bien le sens ny les paroles de cet Auteur, et que le sens qu'il leur donne ne s'accorde pas bien avec celui de Longin ; enfin il fait voir page 181 que M. Despréaux a pris un organe pour un orgue, cela est assez burlesque, M. Despréaux ayant pris le mot grec ORGANUM pour un instrument, pour une flute, une lyre, au lieu de le prendre dans le sens de Longin pour un organe, comme nous disons pour une cause, pour un moyen. Ce sont les termes de M. Dacier qui ont fait voir en tant d'autres endroits comme M. Despréaux n'avoit pas entendu Longin qu'il s'étoit mêlé de traduire, et pour peu qu'on s'attache aux remarques de M. Dacier, on voit bien qu'il aprofondit la matière avec beaucoup d'érudition, et que M. Despréaux ne paroît qu'un écolier au près de ce maître qui le redresse si souvent avec tant de force et de justesse<sup>3</sup>.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Épître dédicatoire of Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les ouvrages du sieur D\*\*\*.*

3. *Nouvelles Remarques, etc.*

Retranchez désormais ce titre illégitime,  
Vous que la Cour nomment les Messieurs du Sublime,  
Vous, que l'on ne devoit entendre qu'à genoux,  
Un Auteur plus sçavant, plus sublime que vous,  
Nous marquant les erreurs de votre prose fade,  
De ce superbe rang aujourd'hui vous dégrade,  
Et fait voir au public découvrant vos défauts,  
Longin et son sublime en proie à D\*\*\* 1.

The *Lutrin* he found irreligious and dangerous to the public morals. This criticism was in accord with earlier complaints against the classical tales condemned by Desmarets.

Lack of sympathy with the great fables of antiquity, his training and personal preference, the influence of the circle in which he moved, and a dislike for Boileau made for Pradon's inclusion in the party of the « Moderns », where his taste and literary ideas found favor.

1. *Ibid.*

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## CHAPTER III

### CONTEMPORARY AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OPINIONS.

In the *Jugement des Savans* Baillet points clearly to what source posterity owes its opinion of Pradon : « Quoique la Satire n'ait pas toujours parlé favorablement des Tragédies de M. Pradon, nous pouvons dire qu'elles n'ont pas laissé d'avoir leurs admirateurs et que M. Despréaux même nous le fait assez connoître en voulant nous marquer le caractère des esprits auxquels cet Auteur semble s'être proportionné » <sup>1</sup>. Content with this scanty praise he echoes the opinion which Boileau had passed upon the poet : « Au reste, si M. Pradon n'a point été du nombre de ces jaloux qui ne travaillent que pour enlever la palme à ceux qui peuvent la leur disputer, et pour s'élever à un degré supérieur de gloire : on peut dire que c'est assez de l'humeur de ces écrivains infortunés qui cherchent de la consolation dans la disgrâce de ceux qu'ils voyent au-dessus ou à côté d'eux. Je crois que c'est dans ce sentiment qu'il nous avertit de ne nous pas allarmer de voir des fautes dans une Pièce dont les vers ne lui ont coûté que trois mois, puisqu'il en trouve bien dans celles qu'on a été deux ans à travailler et à polir » <sup>2</sup>. Some thirty years after Pradon's death Titon du Tillet wrote of him : « Quoique les Pièces de Pradon paroissent assez médiocres elles n'ont pas laissé d'avoir eu dans leurs premières représentations d'illustres partisans... Despréaux, intime de Racine, a rudement traité le pauvre Pradon dans quelques endroits de ses Pièces, et a

1. Baillet : *Jugemens des Savans*, Paris, 1725, IV, 387.

2. *Ibid*, IV, 387-389.

cherché à le rendre méprisable : cependant on ne laisse pas de trouver quelques morceaux dans les Pièces de Pradon, qui satisfont l'homme judicieux, et il ne se passe guères d'années qu'on ne donne sur notre théâtre sa tragédie de *Regulus* ; on y voit aussi représenter quelquefois sa tragédie de *Tamerlan* avec quelques succès »<sup>1</sup>. Opinion at that time was thus becoming more favorable to Pradon's work, although unconcerned about the man himself and still accepting in part the judgment of the great satirist.

In the prefaces to his early plays, *Pirame* and *Tamerlan*, the poet alludes to certain adverse criticism of his work. What that criticism was and from whence it came can be supposed, but no statement from Boileau antedates the production of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*. From 1677 Pradon becomes the butt of ridicule, and Boileau loses no occasion to include him among the inept. Was his hatred then due to a dislike for the sort of work produced ? If so, the earlier plays, when judged by Racine's standards, fall woefully short of excellence. Why did not the satirist condemn them ? Was it not the unfortunate affair of the *Phèdres* which caused Despréaux's wrath, making him see in the second rate rival of Racine a presumptuous upstart whose encroachment was a menace to his friend ? With equal fear and scorn he could say : « Et la scène françoise est en proie à Pradon »<sup>2</sup>. The *Satires* and *Epîtres* which Boileau composed during this year show with what vigor he pursued the author of *Phèdre et Hippolyte* :

Je rencontre à la fois Perrin et Pelletier  
Bonnecorse, Pradon, Colletet, Titreville ;  
Et pour un que je veux, j'en trouve plus de mille<sup>3</sup>.

Here the poet is included among authors previously condemned by the satirist. To be included in such company certainly was not flattering.

1. Titon du Tillet : *Le Parnasse français*, Paris, 1732, 471-472.

2. *Epître VIII*, composed 1675-77.

3. *Satire VII*, *Sur le Genre satirique*.



« Quel est le crime de ce grand nombre de glaçants écrits pour en réchauffer les titres dans vos vers ? Quel mal ont commis tant d'auteurs que vous nommez ?... un autre (Pradon) rend la scène française le Théâtre de Brioché ? <sup>1</sup>

Que vous ont fait tant d'auteurs, pour remuer leur cendre ?  
Que vous ont fait Perrin, Barbier, Pradon, Hainaut.  
Colletet, Pelletier, Titreville, Quinault,  
Dont les noms en cent lieux, placés comme en leurs niches  
Vent de vos vers malins remplir les hémistiches ? <sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

Puisque vous le voulez, je vais changer de style  
Je le déclare donc ; Quinault est un Virgile ;  
Pradon comme un soleil en nos ans a paru <sup>3</sup>.

\* \* \*

Hier, dit-on, de vous on parla chez le roi,  
et d'attentat horrible on traite la satire  
Et le roi, que dit-il ? — Le roi se prit à rire <sup>4</sup>.  
Contre vos derniers vers on est fort en courroux ;  
Pradon a mis au jour un livre contre vous <sup>5</sup>,  
Et chez le chapelier du coin de notre place  
Autour d'un caudebec j'en ai lu la préface.

L'autre jour sur un mot la cour vous condamna,  
Le bruit court qu'avant-hier on vous assassina <sup>6</sup> ;  
Un écrit scandaleux sous votre nom se donne <sup>7</sup>.

\* \* \*

Mais pour un tas grossier de frivoles esprits,  
Admirateurs zélés de toute œuvre insipide,  
Que, non loin de la place où Brioché préside,

1. *Esquisse en prose de la Satire IX.*

2. *Satire IX. — A mon Esprit.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. « Le duc de Montausier ne se lassoit point de blâmer les satires de notre poëte. Un jour le roy peu touché des censeurs que ce seigneur en faisoit, se prit à rire et luy tourna le dos ». — Saint-Marc, cited by Gidel : *Œuvres de Boileau*, Paris, 1872, I, 60, note.

5. Preface of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

6. L'abbé Tallemant avoit fait courir le bruit, et Pradon avoit dit à la table du premier président de Rouen, Pellot, que Boileau avoit reçu des coups de bâton. — Saint-Marc, cited by Gidel : *Œuvres de Boileau*.

7. *Epître VI*. This line refers to the sonnet against the Duc de Nevers.

Sans chercher dans les vers ni cadence ni son,  
Il s'en aille admirer le savoir de Pradon <sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \*

Imite mon exemple ; et lorsqu'une cabale,  
Un flot de vains auteurs follement te ravale,  
Profite de leur haine et de leur mauvais sens  
Ris du bruit passager de leurs cris impuissants <sup>2</sup>,  
Que peut contre tes vers une ignorance vaine ? <sup>3</sup>

These selections from the *Satires* and *Epîtres*, although composed during the year 1677, did not all appear at the same time but were given to the public in succeeding years. Pradon might expect then to find in a new poem from the pen of his enemy some unflattering reference to his work. Even though the quarrel of the *Phèdres* had passed, Boileau did not cease his attacks. In 1686 he addressed *A Messieurs Pradon et Bonnecorse, qui firent en même temps paroître contre moi chacun un volume d'injures*, the following epigram : <sup>4</sup>

Venez, Pradon et Bonnecorse,  
Grands écrivains de même force,  
De vos vers recevoir le prix :  
Venez prendre dans mes écrits  
La place que vos noms demandent :  
Linière et Perrin vous attendent <sup>5</sup>.

Again in 1698, the year of Pradon's death, Boileau accused him of ignorance. The quotation given below leads one to believe that Pradon's plays were in demand at the bookstalls :

Traiter tout noble mot de terme hasardeux,  
Et dans tous vos discours, comme monstres hideux,  
Huer là métaphore et la métonymie  
Grands mots que Pradon croit des termes de chimie.

1. *Epître VI* composed 1677. — A reference to the anecdote concerning Pradon's conversation with the prince de Conti about his knowledge of geography.

2. Reference to Pradon's *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

3. *Epître VII*, à Racine.

4. Pradon published in 1684 his *Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les ouvrages de M. D\*\*\** ; Bonnecorse published in 1686 : *Le Lutigot*.

5. *Epigramme XVII*.

.....  
.....  
En vain contre ce flot d'aversion publique  
Vous tiendrez quelque temps ferme sur la boutique.  
Vous irez à la fin, honteusement exclus,  
Trouver au magasin Pyrame et Regulus <sup>1</sup>.

At the reconciliation of Boileau with Charles Perrault, the satirist was content to declare a truce in the war of Ancient against Modern, but to Pradon no such favor :

Tout le trouble poétique  
A Paris s'en va cesser ;  
Perrault l'anti-pindarique  
Et Despréaux l'homérique  
Consentent de s'embrasser  
Quelque aigreur qui les anime  
Quand, malgré l'emportement,  
Comme ceux, l'un l'autre on s'estime,  
L'accord se fait aisément.  
Mon embarras est comment  
On pourra finir la guerre  
De Pradon et du parterre <sup>2</sup>.

The war between the two men went merrily on. Even in his declining years Boileau lost no occasion to express his contempt for the poet. In a letter dated Auteuil, August 15th, 1699 to Brossette he writes : « Mais est-ce une promesse ou une menace que vous me faites quand vous me mandez qu'au premier jour vous m'enverrez le livre de M. Perrachon ? DI MAGNI HORRIBILEM ET SACRUM LIBELLUM ! Savez-vous que si vous vous y jouez, je cours, sur-le-champ, chez Coignard ou chez Ribou et que la COTINOS, PERALTOS, PRADONOS, ET OMNIA COLLIGAM VENENA ATQUE HOC TE MUNERE REMUNERABO, de la même manière que Catulle prétendait récompenser son ami ; en luy envoyant METIOS, SUFFENOS, ET VARIOS ? » <sup>3</sup>. Another example of Boileau's dislike for Pradon

1. *Épître X : A mes Vers*, written 1697-98, lines 51-54, 57-60.

2. *Épigramme XXIV*.

3. *Œuvres complètes de Boileau*, Paris, 1810. Imprimerie Frères. Mame, t. III, 202, letter IV.



is to be found in the *Boleana* : <sup>1</sup> « Le Verrier s'avisa de lui aller lire une nouvelle tragédie, lorsqu'il étoit dans son lit, n'attendant plus que l'heure de la mort. Ce grand homme eut la patience d'en écouter jusqu'à deux scènes, après quoi il lui dit : « Quoi, Monsieur, cherchez-vous à me hâter l'heure fatale ? Voilà un Auteur devant qui les Boyers et les Pradons sont de vrais soleils. Hélas ! J'ai moins de regret à quitter la vie, puisque notre siècle enchérit chaque jour sur les sottises. » The authenticity of this anecdote is vouched for in a letter from Brossette to Jean Baptiste Rousseau, Lyon, 18 April, 1716 : « Deux jours avant de mourir, il fit quelque chose de pareil à M. Le Verrier. Ce dernier lui apporta la tragédie de Rhadamiste de Crébillon, et lui en lut quelque chose pour le divertir. Dès les premiers vers, la bile de M. Despréaux mourant se ranima, et il dit à M. Le Verrier que cela était au-dessous des Coras, des Cotins et des Pradons » <sup>2</sup>. A similar reference is found in the *Mémoires* of Louis Racine : « M. Le Verrier crut l'amuser par la lecture d'une tragédie qui dans sa nouveauté faisait beaucoup de bruit. Après la lecture du premier acte, il dit à M. Le Verrier : Eh ! mon ami, ne mourrai-je pas assez promptement ? Les Pradons dont nous nous sommes moqués dans notre jeunesse étoient des soleils auprès de ceux-ci » <sup>3</sup>.

From Racine came few remarks concerning Pradon and his work. The preface to *Phèdre* makes no mention of his rival's efforts. Besides the epigrams on Pradon's *La Troade* and *Germanicus* we have the following well known one :

Ces jours passés, chez un vieil histrion,  
Grand chroniqueur, s'émut en question  
Quand à Paris commença la méthode  
De ces sifflets qui sont tant à la mode.

1. *Boleana*, Amsterdam et Paris, chez Belin, an VII de la République, 441-42.

2. P. Bonnefon : *Correspondance de J.B. Rousseau et de Brossette*, I, 54, Paris, 1910, Société des Textes français modernes.

3. Louis Racine : *Mémoires*, édition P. Mesnard : *Œuvres de Jean Racine* (Grands Écrivains), Paris, 1885, I, 361.

« Ce fut, dit l'un, aux pièces de Boyer. »  
Gens pour Pradon voulurent parier :  
« Non, dit l'acteur, je sais toute l'histoire,  
Que par degrés je vais vous débrouiller :  
Boyer apprit au parterre à bailler ;  
Quant à Pradon, si j'ai bonne mémoire,  
Pommes sur lui volèrent largement ;  
Or quand sifflets prirent commencement,  
C'est, j'y jouois, j'en suis témoin fidèle,  
C'est à l'ASPAR du sieur de Fontenelle <sup>1</sup>. »

The following extract from a letter to Boileau gives plainly his opinion of the poet's worth :

A Paris, ce 24 août 1687.

« Les comédiens qui vous font si peu de pitié, sont pourtant toujours sur le pavé, et je crains comme vous, qu'ils ne soient obligés de s'en aller établir auprès des vignes de feu Monsieur votre père. Ce seroit un digne théâtre pour les œuvres de M. Pradon » <sup>2</sup>. The editor explains this reference in his note : « Le père de Boileau avait eu des vignes près du lieu où l'on transportait les immondices de Paris ». Boileau's reply is in the same vein :

A Bourbon, 28 août 1687.

« Vous avez raison de dire qu'ils auront là un merveilleux théâtre pour jouer les pièces de M. Pradon ; et d'ailleurs ils y auront une commodité, c'est que quand le souffleur aura oublié d'apporter la copie de ses ouvrages, il en trouvera infailliblement une bonne partie dans les précieux dépôts qu'on apporte tous les matins en cet endroit » <sup>3</sup>.

Of Brossette, friend and associate of the great satirist, an opinion in accordance with Boileau's can be expected. Jean-Baptiste Rousseau with whom he was in correspondence had

1. Jean Racine : *Œuvres*, édition P. Mesnard (Grands Écrivains), Paris, 1885, IV, 184-5.

2. *Œuvres de Racine*, édition Mesnard, Grands Écrivains, VI, 613, letter 77.

3. *Ibid.*, VI, 617, letter 78.

directed against Pradon an epigram for his remarks concerning Boileau. It is probably from Brossette that biographers have derived their statements regarding the ignorance of Pradon, for Brossette gives credence to the tale concerning Pradon and the Prince de Conti. In his reply to Boileau's letter of August 15th, 1699, quoted above, he says :

A Lyon, 24 sept. 1699.

« Si je ne vous envoie pas la seconde lettre d'Ariste de M. Perrachon, ne croyez pas, Monsieur, que je sois retenu par la menace que vous me faites de me renvoyer en échange Cotinos, Peraltos, Pradonos, etc. Ces beaux presens ne vous acquitteroient point envers moi ; car le seul livre de M. Perrachon vaut le double de tout cela » <sup>1</sup>. In his *Mémoires sur Boileau*, after commenting on Pradon's ignorance, he adds : « Nonobstant l'ignorance de Pradon, quelques personnes ne laisseront pas de dire que si les vers de la *Phèdre* de M. Racine étoient mieux tournez, la conduite de la *Phèdre* de Pradon étoit bien plus régulière » <sup>2</sup>. Note that he refers to M. Racine ; Pradon is given no such complimentary title. Rousseau in agreement with his friend on this subject wrote from Hérulé, April 11th, 1733, to La Font de Saint-Yeune, suggesting the same treatment as Boileau gave Pradon for the miserable rascal, author of *Le Temple du Goût* : « Ainsi je me contenterai d'en user avec lui comme M. Despréaux en a usé les Cotins et les Pradons, c'est-à-dire de le placer dans mes ouvrages quand par hasard il se trouvera en mon chemin, persuadé que le seul nom des gens de cette espèce est la meilleure satire qui se puisse faire de leurs ouvrages et de leur personne » <sup>3</sup>.

Bussy-Rabutin took occasion in his correspondence with P. P. Brulart to give the quarrel of the sonnets in some detail,

1. A. Laverdet : *Correspondance entre Boileau Despréaux et Brossette*, Paris, 1858, p. 27.

2. *Ibid.*, appendice p. 566.

3. P. Bonnefon : *Correspondance de J.-B. Rousseau et Brossette, Société des Textes français modernes*, Paris, 1910, I, 1146.



but he expresses no opinion about our poet : « Racine et Pradon ont fait chacun une comédie intitulée *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, et chacun a sa cabale, M. de Nevers qui est pour Pradon fit l'autre jour ce sonnet contre la comédie de Racine » <sup>1</sup>. Then follow the sonnets cited heretofore. Reference to Pradon's *Troade* occurs in a letter from Rougère to Bussy dated Paris, Jan. 28th, 1679 : « Pradon a voulu par la *Troade* qu'il a fait nous récompenser de *Phèdre* ; ses amis n'en disent mot et les autres s'en moquent » <sup>2</sup>.

We have seen the criticism directed against Pradon's tragedy of *Scipion l'Africain* by the poet Gacon <sup>3</sup>. This mediocre writer included him in his volume *Le Poète sans fard*, the publication of which brought upon its author some months of imprisonment. Thinking to gain favor with Boileau Gacon wrote :

C'est en vain, Despréaux, que Pradon comme un Dogue,  
Ne cesse d'aboyer contre ton Dialogue.  
Cet Ouvrage fameux parmi les beaux esprits,  
Malgré tous ses efforts aura toujours son prix <sup>4</sup>.

Besides the slight references to Pradon in the *Satires* of Gacon <sup>5</sup>, we are indebted to him for the epigram of our poet mentioned before. The reply is in the same vein :

#### RÉPONSE A L'ÉPIGRAMME DE M. PRADON CONTRE MOY.

Quand de peur de tendre la main,  
J'écrirois comme toy seulement pour le gain :  
A tort tu prétends que mon Livre,  
Ne pourroit me donner du pain ;  
Dès que par tes sots Vers tu trouves de quoy vivre,  
L'Auteur le plus mauvais ne peut mourir de faim <sup>6</sup>.

1. Lalanne : *Correspondance de Bussy-Rabutin*, Paris, 1858, p. 205.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

3. See chapter I.

4. Gacon : *Le Poète sans fard*, p. 18, *Satire III*.

5. *Satire II*, p. 15-16 ; *IV*, p. 23 ; *VII*, p. 33. See also his *Epigramme pour répondre à ce que Messieurs Pradon et Perraut m'objectent fausement et sottement, de n'avoir pas de quoy vivre*, p. 202.

6. *Le Poète sans fard*, p. 199, 200.

The most violent diatribe against Pradon, more cutting in its irony than any criticism uttered by Boileau, is to be found in a long poem published in 1711, some thirteen years after the poet's death. In tone and critical opinion this poem follows the judgment passed by Boileau but goes farther in its virulency, accusing Pradon of ignorance, stupid pride, poverty of thought, and craven syncophancy. The opinion expressed throughout is that which has come down from Boileau's time and by much repetition has pervaded literary history :

Pradon dont l'ignorance a fatigué la terre !  
Ton galimathias, tes bouts rimez déçus  
Ont aujourd'hui le sort qu'eut autrefois Crassus.  
Tu prétendais sans doute une illustre victoire  
Mais la faible lumière est mal propre à la gloire.  
Elle cède aux assauts de nos Rimeurs guerriers,  
Et les chardons piquants sont tes plus doux lauriers.  
Que fier de quelque vers que tes amis ont faits,  
Tu crois voir ton mérite au-dessus des souhaits,  
Tu crois te voir déjà la Scène tributaire  
Et ton nom révééré de l'Hidaspe à l'Ibère.

. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . .

Tu voulus marcher seul méprisant les hazards,  
Mais comme tu n'as pas le bonheur des Césars,  
Par un retour cruel et fertile en misères  
Apollon sans pitié te destine aux Galères ;  
Déjà de bouts rimez cent nombreux Bataillons,  
D'un Camp victorieux innoindent les sillons,  
Il en vient d'Italie, on en voit de Carthage,  
Chacun pour t'accabler veut montrer son courage  
Leur Chef plein de fierté prépare tes malheurs,  
Ha ! que ces vers piquants te coûteront de pleurs :  
On voit déjà Thisbé tremblante, désolée  
Par le grand Tamerlan vainement consolée,  
Et tes autres Héros sans Raison couronnez,  
Rendre tous les lauriers qu'on leur avoit donnez,  
A la Cour d'Apollon la vie étoit heureuse,  
On y cherchoit partout la faveur glorieuse,  
Les Favoris sans trouble adoroient sa grandeur ;  
Quand ton chétif esprit courant à son malheur

Guida tes faibles pas aux rentes fortunées  
Où l'on n'arrive pas les premières années <sup>1</sup>.

Pradon's complaint that his *Phèdre* suffered from the attempt of his rival to secure the best actresses for the competing play is alluded to in these lines :

Les Acteurs dont l'adresse est ta divinité  
De toutes leurs faveurs t'ont bientôt écarté  
Tu perdois ton credit au moins d'une journée  
Quand tes habits refaits et Thisbé fort unie  
Trouvent des protecteurs dont le nom et le choix  
Leur donnent aisément de l'étoffe et du poids <sup>2</sup>.

Pradon's attempt to rival Racine is considered sufficient to brand him an unworthy character :

Pradon tu pris si fort l'indigne caractère,  
Que ta témérité croissant avec le tems  
Comme les immortels tu demandas l'encens ;  
Nos premières faveurs furent peu reconnues  
La folle ambition l'éleva sur les nues  
Les bouts rimés d'une vigueur extrême  
Batirent en Pradon la témérité même  
Et comme la raison étoit leur fondement.  
Son grand nom en reçut un grand abaissement,  
Oui malgré son conseil, sa brigue, sa puissance,  
Son mérite pompeux sentit la décadence  
Il se trahit lui-même et perdit en un jour  
Tous les fruits de Thisbé si chère à son amour <sup>3</sup>.

The suggestion is made that Pradon, beaten in the field of dramatic work, convinced of his follies, and fearful of attempting any further effort abandoned the stage. There is no contemporary evidence that such was the case :

(The poet is made to say) :

Mais il faut l'avouer, je ne suis qu'un faible homme,  
Et pour fuir un combat j'irois jusques à Rome.

1. M<sup>lle</sup> de la Roche-Guilen : *La Pradonnade ou la Guerre des Sonnets sur les Rimes du premier Livre de la Pharsale*, Amsterdam, chez F. Bernard, in-12, 1711, p. 229.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*



S'il faut abandonner la qualité d'Auteur  
 J'y consens pour calmer votre armée en fureur,  
 Il dit ce Paladin, que la crainte captive,  
 Et sort ainsi du Camp, où l'on croit que vive,  
 Où les Sonnets vainqueurs armez et furieux,  
 Suivent Pradon en proie à son sort malheureux <sup>1</sup>.

Against the attacks of Boileau and his associates Pradon tried to defend himself. In this contest his supporters availed him little. Success for his dramatic works was the only sure means of silencing his critics, but public favor came seldom to him. By his pamphlets against the works of Boileau he tried to reach his enemy, but the struggle was unequal, for satire was not a field in which he excelled. His criticism of certain phrases and manner of expression peculiar to Boileau is in the main futile, colored at times by partisan spirit and often petty. That he was well aware what a laughing stock he was becoming is clear from the opening remarks of his *Réponse à la Satire X* : « Enfin la *Satire X* du Sieur D\*\*\* attendue depuis si longtemps, vient de paroître. Il ne doit pas trouver étrange de voir son Nom dans mes Vers, puisqu'il a mis le mien tout au long dans les siens » <sup>2</sup>. The same idea is expressed in his *Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les Ouvrages du Sieur D\*\*\** : « Enfin, Monseigneur, me voilà dans les Satires du sieur D\*\*\*, je m'y suis trouvé en trois endroits avec des rimes très riches, afin que l'on ne doute pas de mon nom » <sup>3</sup>.

« Il attaque mes vers, et j'attaque les siens. Je ris à ses dépens comme il veut rire aux miens. Cela est fort naturel : c'est une guerre fort innocente quand on n'attaque ny les mœurs ny la personne ; je luy passeray, s'il le veut, que je suis un fort méchant poète, pour veu qu'il me passe aussi qu'il fait quelque fois de méchants vers, et de grandes fautes de jugement ; mais la différence qu'il y a entre nous deux,

1. *Ibid.*

2. Preface of the *Réponse à la Satire X*.

3. *Ibid.*

c'est que je luy marque et que je luy prouve les siennes » <sup>1</sup>.

His retort to the well known line by Boileau : « Plaint Pradon opprimé des sifflets du parterre » has undoubtedly some merit : « C'est ce même parterre à y répondre pour moy, et je croy que si le Sieur Despréaux vouloit se mêler de venir siffler *Thisbé*, *Tamerlan*, ou *Regulus* qu'il y seroit sifflé luy-même » <sup>2</sup>. To the complaint that some verses of Tamerlan showed evidence of plagiarism he replied : « Quelques Particuliers ne s'abaisseroient point à crier quand on leur imite une syllabe sur des choses qui ne font point de beauté, qui n'ont aucun brillant particulier, et dont tout le monde auroit été contraint de se servir nécessairement, dans des incidents tirés des entrailles d'un sujet, comme des vingt-quatre lettres de l'Alphabet, qui doivent être communes à tous ceux qui se mêlent d'écrire. D'ailleurs s'ils faisoient réflexion sur plusieurs de leurs pièces, ils verroient qu'ils sont eux-mêmes encore moins scrupuleux sur des imitations plus fortes, et on pourroit leur faire connoître qu'ils se souviennent aussi bien des Modernes que des Anciens » <sup>3</sup>. In view of the restricted vocabulary of the seventeenth century Pradon has some right on his side. As for the charge of plagiarism, a study of this tragedy in particular will show if his defense was an attempt to deceive the sharp eyes of the discerning.

The following citations from Pradon's *Nouvelles Remarques* will give an idea of his critical ability. Commenting on the line : « Que tu sais bien, Racine, à l'aide d'un acteur » <sup>4</sup>, he says : « A l'aide d'un acteur n'est pas une belle expression. Il semble qu'on crie à l'aide comme la populace. Secours eut été plus noble et plus naturel ; par malheur il ne pourroit entrer dans ce vers ». Pradon finds fault with Boileau's attitude toward the king. Here his opinion accords with that of the Moderns who continually complained of their oppo-

1. *Nouvelles Remarques*, etc. *Epître à M. le Duc de N...*

2. *Nouvelles Remarques sur tous les ouvrages de M. D\*\*\*.*

3. Preface of *Tamerlan*.

4. Boileau : *Epître VII*.

nents' lack of appreciation for the greatness of Louis' reign : « Il semble que Boileau fait un grand effort pour louer le roi et qu'il lui a fait grâce en ne la déchirant pas... son 180<sup>e</sup> vers (On dira, etc.) est surtout fort insolent ». The line in *Satire X* beginning :

De s'entendre appeler « petit cœur » ou « mon bon. »

he finds trivial and vulgar : « Voilà deux expressions usitées tout au plus à la place Maubert ». He shows himself again a partisan of the Moderns in condemning as irreligious the *Lutrin*, chant IV : Je ne pourrai donc plus être vu que de Dieu ! « Où est le jugement de M. D..., lui qui se pique de dévotion, de mettre un nom si saint, et si auguste dans une satire ? » In the *Lutrin*, chant V, Boileau makes a satirical allusion to the *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* of M<sup>lle</sup> de Scudéry :

« Le Veillard, accablé de l'horrible Artamène. »

Pradon feels called upon to rush to the defense of such a popular idol : « Cet horrible Artamène a été traduit dans toutes les langues, même en arabe ; sa lecture fait les délices de la cour ; il a fait gagner cent mille écus à Courbe ; quand les œuvres de Boileau en auront fait autant à Barbin, on souffrira sa critique un peu plus tranquillement ; mais il y a encore du chemin à faire jusque-là ».

From his friends Pradon received little outward expression of their support. The great personages whose protection he sought were content to let him carry on alone his literary battle. The writers who held ideas in common with him, assailed on their part by Boileau and all the admirers of the ancients, were too busy defending themselves or too fearful of adding to the stream of abuse from Parnassus to attempt to justify him. From La Bruyère, whose discernment in literature was as acute as his judgment of men, one would expect nothing favorable to the poet, yet he has seen fit to include him in his *Caractères* and furthermore acknowledge him a



poet : « Quand on excelle dans son art et qu'on lui donne toute la perfection dont il est capable, l'on en sort en quelque manière, et l'on s'égale à ce qu'il y a de plus noble et de plus relevé. V (Vignon) est un peintre ; (C) Colasse un musicien ; et l'auteur de *Pirame* est un poète ; mais Mignard est Mignard, Lulli est Lulli, et Corneille est Corneille » <sup>1</sup>.

The *Mercure Galant*, official organ of the modernists, did not give much support to the poet. Both de Visé and Thomas Corneille were led by inclination and business necessity to favor all new writers. Their sympathy with the précieuse gallantry of certain social groups and their antagonism to the aesthetic principles of the Ancients made of the *Mercure Galant* an organ of new literary propaganda. In it one would expect to find a sympathetic attitude for Pradon, support of his critical contentions, and praise for his works, but de Visé was too skillful a journalist to bring upon himself and his journal the condemnation of the favored literary leaders by a quixotic support of Pradon. Boileau and Racine were the admired of the court, the favorites of royal sanction ; their literary skill was not to be denied, and nothing was to be gained for the *Mercure* by denying Boileau for the sake of Pradon. It was better to pass over Pradon's weakness, confine the discussion to the merits of the new writer, and ignore the sarcasms of Boileau.

In his first treatment of the quarrel of the *Phèdres*, de Visé adopted these tactics :

Puisque vous souhaitez, Madame, que je vous mande, des nouvelles de tout ce qui a paru de nouveau au Théâtre depuis le premier de janvier, je vous parleray d'abord des deux *Phèdres*. Elles ont fait ici beaucoup de bruit, et j'ay peine à concevoir d'où vient qu'on s'est avisé d'en vouloir juger par comparaison de l'une à l'autre, puisqu'elles n'ont rien de commun que le nom des Personnages qu'on y fait entrer... Ainsi, Madame, je ne voy point qu'on ait eu aucune raison d'examiner laquelle des deux Pièces intéresse plus agréablement l'Auditeur puisqu'elles n'ont aucun rapport ensemble du costé de la principale

1. La Bruyère : *Les Caractères. Du Mérite personnel*, édition *Grands Ecritains*, I, partie II, p. 158.

matière. Il est vrai qu'il n'y a pas la mesme horreur dans le sujet de la Phèdre du Faubourg S.-Germain, mais comme je vous ay déjà dit, ce n'est pas le véritable sujet que l'Auteur de cette dernière a traité ; et puisqu'il n'est permis d'y changer ce qu'il y avoit de plus essentiel, il est d'autant plus responsable de tout ce qui a pu blesser les délicats.

Some three months afterward he wrote :

Monsieur Racine est toujours Monsieur Racine, et ses Vers sont trop beaux pour ne pas donner à la lecture le mesme plaisir qu'ils donnent à les entendre réciter au Théâtre. Pour Monsieur Pradon, il avoue qu'ayant esté obligé de faire sa pièce en trois mois, il n'a pas eu le temps d'en polir ses Vers avec tout le soin qu'il y auroit apporté sans cela. C'est une négligence forcée qu'apparément il n'aura pas dans le premier ouvrage qu'il fera paroître ; mais il n'est pas assuré que cet Ouvrage, quelque achevé qu'il nous le donne, ait un succès aussi avantageux que l'a eu son Hippolyte.

The passage following this excuse of Pradon on the ground of hasty composition is curious. De Visé evidently wished to justify Pradon's tragedy without directly praising its author and at the same time give the impression that the success of Racine's play was due in no small measure to public curiosity aroused by the war of the sonnets. The writer has so barricaded himself behind his phrase that he is safe from attack on either side : « Il y a des occurences, qui selon qu'elles sont plus ou moins favorables, augmentent ou diminuent le prix des choses » — a generalization tending to lull the mind of the reader to an acceptance of what follows : — « et je tiens que le secret de faire réussir celles de cette nature, c'est d'en faire parler beaucoup, quand mesme on n'en feroit dire que du mal ». Racine's tragedy was discussed as to subject matter at least a year before its performance. It is true that the rivalry of the two *Phèdres* added to their drawing power, and one must remember, too, that the war of the sonnets began with a condemning of Racine's play : « Le bruit qui s'en répand excite une curiosité qui attire de grandes assemblées ; et comme le Peuple se persuade que les pièces qui sont suivies



doivent estre bonnes, nous en avons veu quelquefois de très heureuses qui n'ont pas eu l'approbation des Connoisseurs ». This remark looks upon its face to be a justification of Racine's *Phèdre* whose first performances were ill attended ; but in April, when this notice appeared, the success of Pradon's play had passed. The point of departure in this « critique » depends upon who are the « Connoisseurs », a question which de Visé alone can answer. « Ce que je vous dis, Madame », he continues, « est une chose générale, et mon dessein n'est pas de parler de celle de Monsieur Pradon. Quant à sa Préface... je connais beaucoup de gens à qui elle plaist ; il y en a mesme qui la trouvent brillante jusqu'à éblouir, malgré tout ce qu'opposent certains critiques difficiles à satisfaire ». This is guarded praise which later he attempts to strengthen by support drawn from the enemy's camp : « J'ai entendu dire à des Amis de Monsieur Racine, qu'il se seroit tenu très-redevable à Monsieur Pradon s'il avoit fait jouer en italien l'*Hippolyte* qui nous a esté donné en nostre Langue par l'Hôtel de Bourgogne ». His final remarks give to Pradon all the support which he could afford to give : « Monsieur Pradon a eu ses raisons que je veux croire fort bonnes, et je le trouve louable d'avoir reconnu de si bonne foy dans sa Préface qu'il n'a point traité ce sujet par un effet du hasard... mais par un pure effet de son choix. On avoit dit le contraire avant que la pièce parust et il a cru que ce déguisement démentoit la sincérité dont il fait profession » <sup>1</sup>.

Of the tragedies from *Phèdre et Hippolyte* to *Regulus*, the *Mercury* gives but a passing mention. Critical opinion for or against is lacking. The success of the latter play called forth a favorable article : « On représente depuis un mois avec beaucoup de succès une tragédie intitulée *Regulus*... Ce que fit Régulus est si éclatant et part d'une si grande âme, qu'on ne peut l'entendre sans l'admirer. Vous pouvez juger par là qu'il doit y avoir de grandes beautés dans cette

1. *Le Nouveau Mercure Galant*, jan. 1677, p. 28-33 ; avril 1677, p. 73-81.



pièce » <sup>1</sup>. In the short obituary notice announcing the poet's death, the *Mercure* rests the achievement of the poet on the two works whose success was closest to Pradon's heart. His failures, the bad reputation he acquired, the many anecdotes of which he was the subject are withheld. He is remembered simply by « plusieurs Pièces de Théâtre et entr'autres *Pirame et Thisbé* et *Regulus*, qui ont paru avec beaucoup de succès » <sup>2</sup>.

Of a nature similar to the « critique » of de Visé est the *Dissertation sur les deux Phèdres* which is attributed to Subligny, an « avocat de parlement », author of a comedy, *le Désespoir extravagant*, and a piece, *La Folle Querelle*, attacking *Andromaque*. One would expect a dissertation by this enemy of Racine to contain a justification of Pradon, but like de Visé he preferred to adopt an attitude seemingly impartial, wherein Racine is condemned in his aesthetic sense and Pradon in his craftsmanship. The result is a conflicting train of thought in which the greater poet is stupidly misunderstood and the lesser one insufficiently blamed. The mask of impartiality served only to cover Subligny's audacity. His attacks on Racine center mainly around the unsuitability of the incestuous *Phèdre* as a dramatic subject for public presentation. In this he is echoing contemporary criticism. He insinuates that the success of *Pirame and Thisbé* was alarming to Racine; that the ill success of *Tamerlan* was not due wholly to inept workmanship; and that the refusal of an actress to essay the more gracious role of Pradon's *Phèdre* was not due to a mere caprice. The dissertation, divided into two parts, deals first with the tragedy of Racine, then, in contrast, with that of Pradon.

To the latter play his objections are largely technical. Hippolyte has too little reserve; Aricie suffers likewise from over frankness; *Phèdre* is lacking in modesty, is easily deceived by Hippolyte's manifestations for Aricie; the structure of

1. *Mercure Galant*, jan. 1688, p. 341.

2. *Mercure Galant*, jan. 1698, p. 268.

the play is weak and in the last two scenes confused, illogical and badly done. He blames Pradon for treating a subject too odious for the stage, excusing him on the ground of the poet's desire to treat the same subject that Racine had chosen : « J'en dirois autant de M. Pradon si je n'étois persuadé, que l'envie qu'il avoit de traiter le même sujet que M. Racine avoit pris, l'attachait indispensablement à cette odieuse matière... car tous les efforts que fait M. Pradon pour adoucir un si rude sujet, ne lui peuvent servir de rien, il falloit le traiter dans son affreuse vérité ou ne le point toucher du tout » <sup>1</sup> He finds, however, that Pradon's hero is better drawn than Racine's : « M. Pradon a, ce me semble, un peu mieux fondé la crédulité de ce héros » <sup>2</sup>. In spite of faults of composition and lack of noble ideas : « Elle est mieux intriguée que celle de M. Racine, elle suspend davantage les esprits, et excite un peu plus la curiosité ; mais les incidens n'en sont point d'une belle invention, ni d'un heureux succès, ils ne donnent point les hautes espérances, ni les grandes idées dont il faut que la tragédie entretienne ses auditeurs : Enfin, il y a des fautes de jugement qu'on ne peut pardonner » <sup>3</sup>. The blame is apparent but the total impression gained from his criticism is more favorable to Pradon and less to Racine. The recital of Hippolyte's death in the Pradon play « n'est pas supportable » ; the verse is filled with « mots impropres, de constructions barbares et d'expressions rampantes ». The general versification has not « quarante vers supportables en tout ce poème ». However, « c'est toujours beaucoup pour M. Pradon d'avoir pu, au moins parmi le peuple soutenir quelque temps le parallèle avec M. Racine ; et comme les efforts obscurs de ce jeune acteur ont donné de l'éclat au travail de ce dernier on peut dire que la pièce de M. Racine a fait valoir celle de

1. Subligny : *Dissertation sur les tragédies de Phèdre et Hippolyte*, Paris, 1677, in-12, p. 360 (collection : *Recueil de Dissertations sur plusieurs tragédies de Corneille et Racine*, Paris, 1740, by Granet), II, 351-414.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*



M. Pradon, quoiqu'il n'y ait aucune comparaison entre eux ». The dissertation closes with the following verses :

Du soin jaloux qui les occupe  
Le public seulement est devenu le dupe  
Au lieu de se détruire, ils se servent tous deux ;  
Chaque pièce en effet se trouve redevable  
De son succès trop favorable  
A la haine de chacun d'eux  
Et tel peu sensible au mérite  
N'auroit point de Racine été voir l'Hippolyte  
Tel autre de Pradon eut méprisé le soin  
Qui veut de leur querelle être Juge et Témoin.

Subligny like de Visé was too fearful of Boileau to take up the fight openly in favor of Pradon. By insinuation and suggestion he sought to discredit Racine. Though attacking Pradon for the very real faults which his tragedy contained, Subligny discusses the two writers in such a way that the reputation of the greater poet suffers more than that of the other. Pradon, when condemned, is not blamed, as he should be, for his attempt to rival one who was superior to him, his carelessness of construction, and the stupidity displayed in the character drawing of his *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

The silence of contemporaries can only be explained on the ground that writers were afraid to express a favorable opinion in the face of condemnation from Parnassus. Those who were not occupied in literary pursuits had no occasion to write in his defense. Both parties were content to let the poet attempt his own justification while they remained by their silence safe from royal displeasure and the fury of a lampoon. In this way, Boileau's opinions remained dominant throughout the latter part of Louis' reign. After his death and the passing of the « Siècle Louis XIV », the dicta of the satirist became for the succeeding age the correct judgment on his contemporaries. Biographers of the theatre, however, were always confronted with the success of *Regulus* and its ability to hold the stage well into the eighteenth century. Voltaire<sup>1</sup> complained

1. Voltaire : *Œuvres*, Paris, 1833, Didot, — *Correspondance*, année 1764,



of the favor given this play, yet it held the attention of audiences. That its author should have been the laughing stock of his day as Boileau represented him and still been able to produce a tragedy of sustaining qualities puzzled the critics. His age had left of him an unfavorable portrait but his tragedies *Pirame*, *Tamerlan* and *Regulus*, when read in an impartial spirit, did not support Boileau's contention about his work. Eighteenth century critics began to study the cause of this animosity. They soon arrived at a judgment less harsh toward Pradon, although careful in its regard for the opinion handed down by the satirist, lest they seemed to err in granting to Pradon too much. De Beauchamps, writing of the poet in 1735, says : *Sa querelle avec Racine au sujet de sa Phèdre lui attira de la part de Despréaux plusieurs traits de satire dont il ne peut se relever ; on ne laisse pas de trouver de bonnes choses dans ses pièces, et l'on revoit encore avec plaisir celles de Tamerlan et de Regulus* » <sup>1</sup>.

Michault in the article devoted to Pradon in Nicéron's *Mémoires* went to the heart of the matter and placed upon Boileau the blame for the bad impression of his works spread abroad and upon the poet himself for his foolish temerity in rivaling Racine : « Nicolas Pradon seroit peut-être aujourd'hui un poète assez inconnu, s'il n'avoit eu la témérité d'entrer en concurrence avec le fameux Racine : aussi on peut dire que la réputation de ce dernier n'a pas peu servi à faire parler de son rival. Despréaux a aussi répandu un ridicule si frappant sur le caractère et les ouvrages de Pradon, qu'on n'oubliera jamais la manière outrageante dont ce redoutable critique l'a traité » <sup>2</sup>. He does not hesitate to include the tale told by Brossette of Pradon's ignorance

letter to d'Argental, 24 mai 1764, LXI, 433. See also *Discours prononcé avant la représentation d'« Eriphyle »*, III, 3, and *Discours sur la Tragédie*, II, 361.

1. De Beauchamps : *Recherches sur les Théâtres de France*, Paris, 1735, p. 258.

2. Nicéron : *Mémoires*, XLIII, 371.

and is careful to draw his reader's attention to the fact that no apology of the poet is intended, either for his taste, talents, or writings which he says are généralement « méprisés ». His critical judgment tends toward a more accurate estimate of the poet's work, which shows that Boileau's opinions were being weighed with greater care : Mais je demanderois volontiers grâce pour quelques-unes de ses pièces ; et malgré le jugement du public que Despréaux a fort prévenu contre cet auteur j'ose assurer que le Théâtre s'est trouvé en proie à des poètes qui lui sont beaucoup inférieurs, et qui ont ennuyé longtemps le spectateur avec impunité. Cependant qu'on ne m'accuse pas de m'ériger en admirateur de Pradon ; j'avoue que c'est un écrivain fort médiocre... Mais après tout, méritoit-il toute la honte et le mépris dont Despréaux l'a couvert dans ses satires ? Non, sans doute, et Despréaux ne l'a cherché et ne l'a accablé de mille traits piquans, que pour venger Racine d'un concurrent importun » <sup>1</sup>.

The frères Parfaict, who drew upon Nicéron for their information concerning the poet, follow the earlier historian in his attempted justification of Pradon's work. Of his *Pirame* they speak in slighting terms : « Quoique cette pièce ait été très applaudie dans sa nouveauté, et même restée au Théâtre pendant près de quarante ans, cependant on se tromperoit fort, si l'on vouloit par là juger de son mérite » <sup>2</sup>. Their opinion of *Tamerlan* is more favorable than that of previous critics : « En général, cette tragédie est assez passable, cependant elle pêche par la conduite, et encore plus par les caractères... La versification est foible, inégale ; on y trouve des pensées mais souvent fausses, et mal exprimées » <sup>3</sup>. In their discussion of Pradon's *Phèdre*, they cite at length from the articles of de Visé in the *Mercure Galant* and the *Dissertation* of Subligny. The reader has to form

1. Nicéron : *Mémoires*, XLIII, 371.

2. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre*, XI, 348.

3. *Ibid* : XI, 431.



his own opinion from these two critics. The historians' judgment rests upon an acceptance of de Visé's remarks : « Jamais M. De Visé n'a parlé plus juste qu'en faisant cette réflexion sur les deux tragédies dont nous parlons... j'ai peine à concevoir d'où vient qu'on s'est avisé d'en vouloir juger par comparaison de l'une à l'autre, puisqu'elles n'ont rien de commun que le nom des personnages »<sup>1</sup>. The article by de Visé seems to them, however, rather insufficient : « Qui donne une idée très-louche des deux Pièces ; il semble même pencher pour celle de M. Pradon ». They recognize that « Entre les amis de M. Racine, M. Despréaux étoit celui qui, par autorité sur le Parnasse paroissoit le plus à craindre à M. Pradon ». For the remaining part of their article they follow Subligny. *La Troade*, « malgré les défauts », is in their judgment, « une des plus passables de l'Auteur et le rôle d'Andromaque est assez beau »<sup>2</sup>. In *Statira* they find no merit except a certain improvement in versification over the preceding tragedies : « Il est vrai que la versification est un peu plus passable que celle de ses autres ouvrages »<sup>3</sup>. When they discuss *Regulus* they give the poet his due for having accomplished with a difficult subject a satisfactory piece of writing :

Voici le triomphe de M. Pradon. Le sujet en est simple, grand, noble et intéressant, mais en même temps très difficile à être assujetti aux règles du Théâtre, principalement à celle d'unité de lieu. Cet obstacle, qui seul avoit effrayé tous ceux qui ont tenté de traiter cet événement, et la manière dont notre Poète s'en est acquitté suffisent pour faire son éloge... Nous le répétons, le sujet de cette Tragédie est parfaitement beau : un Poète plus habile... l'auroit sans doute mieux conduit que Pradon, mais il est toujours glorieux pour lui d'avoir trouvé les moyens de vaincre des difficultés qui paroissoient insurmontables<sup>4</sup>.

The final judgment passed upon Pradon takes the same form as that of Nicéron :

1. *Ibid.*, XII, 50, and note, 51, note.

2. *Ibid.*, XII, 140.

3. *Ibid.*, XII, 159.

4. *Ibid.*, XIII, 69, 72-73.



S'il s'étoit voulu contenter d'une place parmi les Poètes médiocres, il l'auroit obtenu sans peine et il l'auroit rempli dignement : mais son ambition n'a servi qu'à le rendre la fable du Parnasse, jusque-là qu'on lui a refusé les éloges qu'il méritoit. Il semble qu'il ne soit plus permis de le louer, depuis que M. Despréaux prenant le parti de M. Racine son ami, a répandu un ridicule si frappant sur le caractère et les Ouvrages de ce Poète que son nom servira à la postérité pour désigner un méchant Auteur... Nous ne pouvons, en Historiens équitables, nous dispenser d'observer que cet Auteur n'étoit pas sans mérite, qu'il avoit quelquefois du feu, et peignoit assez bien certains endroits et avec force <sup>1</sup>.

The abbé de la Porte in his *Observateur littéraire* asks the question that has puzzled earlier historians : « Pradon est-il aussi mauvais poète que la satire veut le faire croire ? A-t-il mérité toute la vigueur du jugement prononcé contre lui ? » <sup>2</sup> The conclusions arrived at are much the same as those of previous critics, yet the abbé has looked beyond the mere quarrel of the *Phèdres*, with Boileau's attendant diatribes, to the society of the time, its interest in and influence on the poet :

On ne peut cependant sans injustice, lui refuser de l'esprit, de l'imagination, de la facilité, et la connaissance des Règles du Théâtre. La plupart de ses Tragédies seroient peut-être plus estimées s'il eut venu dans un temps moins fécond en grands poètes ; ou si, plus modeste, il n'eut pas voulu lutter avec Racine... Boileau n'épargna rien pour l'humilier ; et l'on peut reprocher à ce terrible adversaire d'avoir outré la satire, en représentant l'auteur de *Regulus* comme un Poète constamment sifflé, bafoué de toutes parts, et tombé généralement dans le mépris. S'il eut des amis, il eut aussi ses partisans, j'ose même dire ses admirateurs. Aujourd'hui, ceux qui ne jugent point de ses ouvrages d'après les Vers de Despréaux, avouent que Pradon sçavoit conduire régulièrement une Tragédie, en ménager les incidens, y placer des peintures vives, des traits heureux, des situations intéressantes, quelquefois neuves, des mouvemens forts et véhémans ; que sa versification même en générale si vicieuse, ne doit pas être condamnée sans restriction. Concluez Monsieur, que si Pradon avoit su se tenir dans son rang, s'il n'avoit pas eu la vanité ridicule

1. *Ibid.*, p. 79-82.

2. Abbé de la Porte : *Observateur littéraire*, Amsterdam et Paris, 1760, p. 25.

de se comparer à Racine et surtout, s'il n'avoit pas été l'ennemi de Boileau, son nom, moins décrié seroit cité avec moins de mépris. En un mot, Pradon seroit aujourd'hui un Poète passable, s'il eût été un Poète modeste <sup>1</sup>.

I. Abbé de la Porte : *Observateur littéraire*, Amsterdam et Paris, 1760, p. 90-91. Also La Porte et Chamfort : *Anecdotes dramatiques*, Paris, 1775, III, 408.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE SOURCES OF THE TRAGEDIES.

#### (a) *Pirame et Thisbé*

The tragedy of *Pirame et Thisbé* was produced at the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1674<sup>1</sup>. The scene is laid at Babylon in the palace of Belus. The stage directions which the *Mémoire de Mahelot* gives for this tragedy contain only the simple statement : « Théâtre est un palais. Il faut 2 billets »<sup>2</sup>. The plot runs as follows : — Amestris, queen of Babylon, upon the death of the king has usurped the throne, refusing to turn over the government to her son Belus, the rightful heir, preferring to hold the power herself and ruling meanwhile by severity and terror. She has fallen in love with the young Pirame, son of one of her supporters, Arsace, an ambitious man who wishes to see his son reign with Amestris, hoping thus to bring credit and influence to his family and stabilize the rather uncertain position of Amestris. Pirame, however, loves Thisbé, the daughter of a family with whom his father has become embroiled, for Arsace caused the death of Thisbé's father. The girl has recently returned to the court at the request of the queen. She loves Pirame but fears that evil consequences may arise from this

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XI, 348.

2. H. C. Lancaster : *Le Mémoire de Mahelot, Laurent et d'autres décorateurs de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne et de la Comédie-Française*, Paris, Champion, 1920, p. 128.

love for her father's murderer. Arsace opposes his son's love, and, wholly absorbed in the advantages of an alliance with the queen, tries to force Pirame to abandon Thisbé and follow the course leading to political power.

Unable to change his father's views, Pirame turns to the queen for aid in bringing about the marriage. When Amestris learns of Pirame's love for another she becomes jealous of her rival Thisbé and more decided than ever to marry Pirame herself. Arsace, whose hatred for the family of Thisbé is increased by her presence now so annoying to his plans, joins with the queen in plotting her ruin. Bélus, the son of Amestris, knowing his mother's love for Pirame and suspecting political motives behind this passion which would ruin his plans, makes love to Thisbé. To injure his rival's suit he tells her of the queen's love for Pirame, suggesting that perhaps Pirame would prefer a marriage of advantage to one of love. Pirame, fearing that his father's influence with the queen will bring about Thisbé's ruin, feigns acceptance of his demands and promises to support the queen. Amestris tells Thisbé her lover's life is in danger unless she marries Bélus and ceases to be the queen's rival. Thisbé, uncertain of Pirame's love, is greatly perplexed : to save him should she marry the hated Bélus, or do away with herself. Pirame, in the meanwhile, has been drawn to the queen's party in an insurrection which Bélus caused hoping to gain the throne. Although he has not fought for the queen, Pirame is imprisoned by order of Bélus but escapes to find Thisbé. He assures her again of his love and urges her to flee with him. After some hesitation she decides to accompany him. She starts for the meeting place outside the city near the tomb of the king Ninus where Pirame is to come later.

Bélus, meanwhile, has become master of the situation. The fleeing Arsace is pursued and brought back a prisoner by the king's soldiers ; Amestris, seeing that her son has gained the throne, lives now only to lament her unrequited love, jealous of Thisbé, and hating Pirame for

his lack of affection. Arsace, brought back by the soldiers, relates the sad fate of the lovers. Fleeing to the woods he saw his own son who appeared to avoid him. He succeeded in overtaking him. Pirame was looking for Thisbé, but no trace of her was visible. A bloody veil upon the ground similar to one she wore made him conclude she had been devoured by a wandering lion. Despairing at his loss Pirame stabbed himself with a dagger and lay upon the ground in the last agony of death. Thisbé then appeared from her hiding-place, where she had indeed sought protection from a lion, saw her unfortunate lover, and had barely time to receive his last embraces. Mad with grief, she killed herself with the dagger which had brought death to her loved one. While Arsace is finishing his account, the bodies of the lovers are brought upon the stage. This sight so moves the evil hearts of Amestris and Arsace that they vow to follow the ill-fated pair and thus atone for their own evil deeds.

The legend of Pirame and Thisbé, treated by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*<sup>1</sup>, had been used by Théophile de Viau in his tragedy *Les Amours tragiques de Pirame et Thisbé* (1625), and again by Puget de la Serre in the tragedy of *Pyrame* (1633). Pradon in the preface to his tragedy claims to have borrowed nothing from Théophile: « Je ne me repens donc point d'avoir traité un sujet où Théophile avoit réussi : on voit bien que je ne lui ai rien emprunté que les noms de Pirame et Thisbé que le galant Ovide nous a donnés à tous deux. J'y ai fait un épisode d'Amestris et de Bélus qui, quoique fondés dans l'Histoire, sont des caractères de mon invention, aussi bien que celui d'Arsace »<sup>2</sup>. The plot of his tragedy shows no trace of the influence of *Pyrame*, the tragedy by Puget de la Serre, but Pradon's contention that he owes nothing to Théophile de Viau is false. The sources of the tragedy are of a three-fold nature. The historical characters are to be found in

1. Book, IV, 1, 56, London, 1916, Heineman.

2. Preface of *Pirame et Thisbé*.



Ovid, Plutarch, Herodotus, and Diodorus the Sicilian ; the sentimental situations in Théophile ; and the general romanesque tone in Pradon's early influences and milieu.

Classical legend shows us Thisbé, a beautiful female of Babylon, between whom and a youth named Pyramus, a native of the same place, a strong attachment subsisted. Because their parents were averse to their union, they adopted the expedient of receiving each other's addresses through the chink of a wall which separated their dwellings. In the course of time they arranged a meeting at the tomb of Ninus under a wild mulberry tree ; Thisbé, enveloped in a veil, arrived first at the appointed place ; but, terrified at the appearance of a lioness, she fled precipitately and in her flight dropped her veil which, lying in the animal's path, was rent by it, and smeared with the blood that stained the jaws of the lioness from the recent destruction of some cattle. Pyramus, coming soon after to the appointed place, beheld the torn and bloody veil, and, concluding that Thisbé had been destroyed by some savage beast, slew himself in despair. Thisbé, returning after a short interval to the spot where she had encountered the lioness, saw the bleeding form of Pyramus, and threw herself upon the fatal sword, still warm with the blood of her lover <sup>1</sup>.

Such is the legend which Ovid has transmitted. It will be noticed that Pradon has taken, at least in general outline, the chief figures, Pirame and Thisbé, but the hostility of the families is pushed to an open and deadly hatred of which Thisbé's father has been a victim. Furthermore, Ovid does not suggest absolute refusal of consent to marry on the part of the parents but merely a neighborly dislike. Pradon has thus enlarged on the incident of the family quarrel and placed his tragedy in a Babylonian setting. He does not say that the romance occurred during the reign of Sémiramis but in the city made famous by this queen. In fact

1. Anthon : *Classical Dictionary*, New-York, 1841, p. 1332.

he has kept the setting but substituted the characters of Amestris, Bélus, and Arsace, as he says, from history. Amestris is indeed to be found in history. Herodotus says of her : « I was informed that Amestris also, the wife of Xerxes, when she had grown old, made return of her life to the god who is said to be beneath the earth by burying twice seven children of Persians who were men of renown » <sup>1</sup>. Amyot in his translation of Plutarch's *Lives* speaks of an Amestris : « Amestris la mère du roy Xerxes enfouit en terre douze hommes vivans dont elle faisoit offrir à Pluton pour cuider allonger sa vie », and further in a note to the above : « Amestris, femme de Xerxes, princesse d'un caractère atroce. Xerxes ayant conçu de l'amour pour la femme de son frère, Mésistes, Amestris fit couper à sa rivale les oreilles, le nez les lèvres et la langue » <sup>2</sup>.

The ferocity of Amestris is thus established but the imposing figure of a great queen ruling by force of her will to the exclusion of her son is lacking. Such a character belongs to the Babylonian queen Semiramis who is described by Amyot after Plutarch in the following manner :

Semiramis du pais de Syrie étoit serve et concubine d'un esclave du grand roy Ninus, lequel roy depuis qu'il l'eut une fois halenée, en fut si fort épris, et elle le maîtrisa et méprisa tant qu'elle oza bien luy requérir qu'il la laissait seoir tout un jour dedans son throsne avec le diadème royal autour de la teste, donner audience et despescher affaires comme luy. Ce que Ninus luy ayant ottroyé ; et commande que chacun luy rendist obeissance comme à luy mesme et feist tout ce qu'elle ordonneroit, elle usa modestement de ses premières ordonnances envers les gardes du corps, et quand elle veit qu'ils ne luy contredisoient en rien, elle leur commanda de le prendre au corps et puis de le lier, et finalement de le tuer. Ce qui ayant esté entièrement executé, elle régna, et commanda en grande magnificence à toute l'Asie par un bien longtemps <sup>3</sup>.

Diodorus the Sicilian gives considerable space to this queen of Babylon to whom he ascribes a miraculous birth.

1. Herodotus : *History*, VII, 114.

2. Amyot : *Œuvres mêlées de Plutarque*, Paris, 1803, XIV, 281.

3. *Ibid.* De l'Amour, V. chap. xxii, 245.



His account differs somewhat from Plutarch's, although he credits the Athenians with the legend that she was a strumpet. He represents her as a beautiful wife of a general attached to the army of king Ninus who afterward received her as a present from his general. After the king's death she carried on great war enterprises. By him she had a son Ninyas. It is said that before her Egyptian campaign she went to consult an oracle to find out how long she would live. The oracle replied that she would leave the world when her son Ninyas should be plotting against her. Later, being assaulted by a eunuch through the treacherous connivance of Ninyas, she turned the government over to her son without punishing him <sup>1</sup>. Pradon has modeled Amestris, whose existence in history both Herodotus and Plutarch attest, upon the character of Semiramis as given by Diodorus and Plutarch, endowing her with the governmental skill and political position of Semiramis and a temperament drawn half from the historical Amestris and half from Semiramis. He was perfectly justified in assigning to Babylon a second queen who had ruled alone. Herodotus, speaking of Semiramis, says : « Of these rulers, the one who ruled first, named Semiramis, who lived five generations before the other, produced banks of earth in the plain which was a sight worth seeing... The queen who lived after her time, named Nitocris, was wiser than she who had reigned before ; and it was the son of this woman bearing the same name as his father, Labynetos, who ruled over the Assyrians against whom Cyrus was marching » <sup>2</sup>.

The prototype of Bélus is to be found in Diodorus, although the historian names Semiramis's son Ninyas. Bélus was a common name in Babylonian history. Herodotus ascribes it to the founder of the dynasty <sup>3</sup>.

The chief characters of the tragedy are thus drawn from

1. Diodorus the Sicilian : *History*, vol. II, book II, chap. I, London, 1814, G. Booth.

2. Herodotus : *History*, I, 184.

3. *Ibid.*, I, 7.



Ovid, Herodotus, Plutarch and Diodorus. These historians were well known to seventeenth century society through translations made in the preceding century. Amyot translated seven books of Diodorus in 1554, Plutarch's *Lives* in 1559, and his moral works in 1574 ; Du Ryer had given a translation of Herodotus in 1645.

From Théophile Pradon says he borrowed nothing. The abbé de la Porte tells us that Pradon was accused of imitating Théophile and of copying some of his verses : « On l'accuse aussi d'avoir trop imité Théophile et de s'être servi de quelques-uns de ses vers, qu'il n'a fait pour ainsi dire que copier » <sup>1</sup>. Pradon has done more than copy occasional lines. He has made a rather clever inversion of Théophile's plot, drawing his sentimental incidents from this inverted model of the earlier tragedy. In Théophile's treatment the king is in love with Thisbé who does not return his affection because she loves Pirame. Narbal, the father of the boy, is angry with him because he loves Thisbé. She belongs to a family hostile to Narbal who has caused the banishment of Thisbé's father. The king, aided by Syllar, his confidant, decides to rid himself of his rival Pirame. From this menace and that of Pirame's father the lovers are forced to flee and they meet the fate described by Ovid. Here, too, death is brought about by means of a dagger and not a sword as in Ovid.

Théophile makes the king love Thisbé with no success. (Act. I, sc. 3).

Pradon has Amestris love Pirame to no avail. (Act. I, sc. 1.)

Narbal does not wish his son to love Thisbé. (Act. I, sc. 2.)

Arsace dislikes his son's affection for Thisbé. (Act. I, sc. 1.)

1. Abbé de La Porte : *Dictionnaire dramatique*, Paris, 1776, II, 497-8.

Narbal has caused the exile of Thisbé's father. (Act. I, sc. 2.)

Arsace has killed Narbal, the father of Thisbé. (Act. I, sc. 1.)

The king decides to remove Pirame, his rival. (Act. I, sc. 3.)

The queen Amestris will remove Thisbé, her rival. (Act. I, sc. 7.)

Syllar, the king's confidant, is his aid and accomplice. (Act. I, sc. 3.)

Arsace plays this role with Amestris, likewise her confidante Barsine. (Act. I, sc. 5.)

Bélus is a new element. His love for Thisbé serves to destroy the evil-minded queen and establish justice. The theme for Pradon's play may be found in Thisbé's speech (Act. I, sc. 1) in Théophile's tragedy :

Que les discours mutins d'une haine ancienne  
Divisent la maison de Pyrame et la mienne.

and in Bersiane's statement :

L'Amour, l'ambition, l'orgueil et la cholère  
Sont toujours sur nos fronts d'une apparence claire.

In a few places Pradon has run close to Théophile's original :

Théo. — (IV, 1) PYRAME. Je doutois que l'on peust aimer si  
[constamment,

Et que tant d'amitié fust pour moy  
[seulement

Que des objets plus beaux...

THISBÉ. — N'achève point, Pyrame,  
Un si mauvais soupçon ; tu blesse-  
[rois mon âme.

Mon cœur, et quel plaisir prens-tu  
[de m'affliger ?

PYRAME. — , car j'ose m'assurer  
Que tu n'aimes que moy.

Pradon. — (IV, 4) PYRAME. — Ah, Dieux ! si vous m'aimiez...

THISBÉ. — Je ne vous aime pas,  
Ingrat ? de mon amour pourriez-vous  
estre en doute ?

Quel plaisir prenez-vous à voir cou-  
[ler mes larmes ?

Theo. — (III, 1) PYRAME. — Dieux ! tout mon sang se trouble ;  
[il est vrai que le roy  
Ayme à ce, qu'on m'a dit, en mesme  
[lieu que moy  
Hélas ! je suis perdu, mon mal est  
[sans remède.  
Contre mon roy quel Dieu puis-je  
[trouver qui m'aide.

Pradon. — (III, 8) THISBÉ. — Qu'entens-je ? Ah, Dieux ! que  
[vois-je ? où suis-je ? je frissonne ;  
Je tremble. Que d'horreurs ! Pi-  
[rame m'abandonne !  
Fière Amestris, hélas ! tu me viens  
[arracher  
Par l'éclat de ton trône un cœur qui  
[m'est si cher.

pour le dégager  
La Reine, ouy la Reine, éclate en ce  
[danger,  
Quel secours ? De quel bras ce  
[secours ?

Théophile in Act. III, sc. 1 has Pyrame suggest to Thisbé that they flee, and after a debate which carries over to scene 4 they decide upon this course. Pradon in Act IV, sc. 4 of his tragedy arranges a similar scene.

The influence of Pradon's milieu is noticeable in his drawing of the character Amestris, the proud jealous queen, bent upon ruling, sweeping aside every obstacle to gain her end, and in Bélus, of a like temperament, both struggling for power and impeded by a passion which threatens to ruin them. Such were the heroes and heroines of Corneille. The



political tone of the tragedy, the strife between love and duty, love and honor, is in the manner of the old master. Pradon, following a Cornelian course much like that of *Le Cid*, added to Ovid's story the family feud. Théophile's plot is simpler, more personal, more poetic than Pradon's but less in accordance with classic rules. This first tragedy shows Pradon's tendency to complicate the plot by antithetical situations and to give to the love element either too large a part in a political drama or too coldly intellectual a tone in sentimental situations. In the tragedy the influence of Quinault's school struggles with the Cornelian for the mastery. Further evidence of this confusion will be seen in his succeeding plays.

(b) *Tamerlan*

The tragedy of *Tamerlan ou la Mort de Bajazet* was played at the Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1675<sup>1</sup>. The scene is in the camp of Tamerlan and the plot runs as follows : After causing the death of the son and wife of his captive Bajazet, Tamerlan fell in love with Astérie, daughter of Bajazet, and a prisoner like her father. She, however, is the promised bride of Andronic, son of the Greek emperor of Constantinople. After his father's death Andronic was forced to flee to Tamerlan and ask aid to recover his throne from the grasp of his brother who was then receiving aid from the now conquered Bajazet. Any alliance with Tamerlan is loathsome to Bajazet. Tamerlan, hoping to influence the princess in his favor, softens his harsh treatment of the royal prisoner. But Astérie and Andronic love each other. To retain this love Andronic tries to save Bajazet. Meanwhile the Princess of Trébizonde, whom Tamerlan for political reasons had thought to marry, approaches his camp. He decides to marry Andronic to her and reserve Astérie for himself. The knowledge

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XI, 430.

of this arrangement makes Astérie fear that Andronic will be unfaithful to her and that her father's cause will lose his support. Tamerlan makes known to her his love. This causes the young lovers grave fears that he may find out their love and wreak his vengeance on Bajazet. They debate whether each shall follow the path of duty or love — Andronic wishing to make known his love, refuse the high state destined for him, and marry Astérie ; she wishing to marry Tamerlan to save both her father and her lover. Tamerlan discovers their love by Andronic's indifference to the favor his chief intends for him. Andronic declares openly his love, braving Tamerlan's anger, and Astérie to save him promises to marry the hated conqueror. In the meanwhile Bajazet plots to escape and bribes his fellow-prisoners to dig for him an underground passage of escape but the attempt is discovered. Tamerlan enraged declares that either Astérie must marry him or he will put Bajazet and Andronic to death. Bajazet, in whose hands Astérie has put the decision of her fate, taunts his conqueror by his persistent refusal to acquiesce in the marriage and only escapes the vengeance of Tamerlan by taking poison. Moved by the greatness of the fallen monarch, Tamerlan renounces Astérie, bestows her upon Andronic, and decides to marry the Princess of Trébizond.

Turkish history had been used for tragic plots on various occasions before Pradon's play. Gabriel Bounyn wrote a tragedy in 1561 called *La Soltane*, the subject of which was the death of Mustapha strangled by order of his father Soliman the Great : Mairet's *Le grand et dernier Solymán*, 1639, was written upon the same subject following the model of *Il Solimano*, Venice, 1619, by Bonarelli della Rovere ; Dalibray's *Le Soliman*, 1637, followed this Italian play. Desmares in 1643 wrote *Roxélane* ; Magnon, *Le grand Tamerlan et Bajazet*, 1647 ; and Racine his *Bajazet*, 1672, all drawn from Turkish history.

Pradon in his preface says that the subject matter is to be .



found in Chalcondyles's history and in the translation of an Arabian author : « J'ai fait un honnête homme de Tamerlan contre l'opinion de certaines gens qui vouloient qu'il fût tout à fait brutal et qu'il fit mourir jusques aux gardes. J'ai tâché d'apporter un tempérament à sa férocité naturelle, et d'y mêler un caractère de grandeur et de générosité qui est fondé dans l'Histoire, puisqu'il refusa l'Empire des Grecs, et qu'il a été un des plus grands Hommes du Monde : Cela se peut voir dans Calchondile, et surtout dans une traduction d'un auteur arabe, où la vie de Tamerlan et ses grandes actions sont écrites tout au long »<sup>1</sup>. The critics were not satisfied with this statement of sources and accused him apparently of borrowing from his contemporaries. Pradon felt called upon to reply to their insinuations :

Il seroit seulement à souhaiter que ces Messieurs tinssent le même langage qu'ils font tenir à leurs Héros ; qu'en faisant admirer leurs Ouvrages ils fissent admirer, en même temps leur procédé, et que les sentimens de leur cœur fussent aussi généreux et aussi grands que ceux de leur esprit. Ils ne s'abaisseroient point à crier quand on leur imite une syllabe sur des choses qui ne font point de beautés, qui n'ont aucun brillant particulier et dont tout le monde auroit été contraint de se servir nécessairement, dans des incidens tirés des entrailles d'un Sujet comme des vingt-quatre Lettres de l'Alphabet qui doivent être communes à tous ceux qui se mêlent d'écrire. D'ailleurs s'ils faisoient réflexion sur plusieurs de leurs Pièces, ils verroient, qu'ils sont eux-mêmes encore moins scrupuleux sur des imitations plus fortes, et on pourroit leur faire connoître qu'ils se souviennent aussi bien des Modernes que des Anciens, et qu'ils possèdent avec autant d'avantage les beautés de Tristan, de Mairêt, et de Rotrou que celle d'Homère, de Sophocle et d'Euripide<sup>2</sup>.

Pradon has indeed done more than use stock incidents, the common property of dramatic writers. He has drawn his historical facts from the history of Chalcondyles and from Du Bec's translation of an Arab historian, supplemented these facts with sentimental elements borrowed from Magnon's *Le Grand Tamerlan et Bajazet*, and placed his characters

1. Preface of *Tamerlan*.

2. *Ibid.*



in situations copied from Racine's *Andromaque* and *Bajazet*. The translation of an Arabian author mentioned in his preface was Du Bec's, as Herr Degenhart pointed out in his study of the Tamerlan story in European literature <sup>1</sup>.

Before 1675 ten historians had written about Tamerlan <sup>2</sup> of which three are important for us :

Ahmed ibn Arabschah (born XIV or XV century, Damascus, died middle XV century at Cairo) — Vattier in 1658 made a French translation : *Hist. du grand Tamerlan traduite de l'arabe*.

Laonicus Chalcondyles : *History of Byzantium* in ten volumes, 1298-1463, preserved in a single manuscript in Paris and first edited by I. Bulliard, Paris, 1649. A French translation by B. de Vigénère appeared at Paris in 1577 and 1632 <sup>3</sup>.

Jean Du Bec : *Histoire du grand Tamerlan tiré des monuments antiques des Arabes*, 1587, second edition, 1594.

Beside Chalcondyles, the only French translations of Turkish history were those of Vattier and Du Bec. Degenhart gives an historian Alhazen as source of Du Bec's translation : « Du Bec's Buch soll die Uebersetzung eines mit nicht auffindbaren arabischen Autors, Alhazen, sein ; die ganzen Form und Anlage des Buches, seine Schilderung des Characters Tamerlans die Reden besonders ueber politische und religiöses sittliche Fragen lassen es jedoch als apokryph erscheinen » <sup>4</sup>. Comparing then Pradon's *Tamerlan* with that of Vattier and Du Bec, Degenhart concludes that Du Bec was the source, for Vattier's Tamerlan does not conform to Pradon's figure.

Pradon's character of Tamerlan resembles Du Bec's de-

1. Degenhart : *Tamerlan in den Literaturen des westlichen Europas* — *Archiv für Studium der neueren Sprache und Literaturen*, CXXIII, Heft, 3, 4, p. 253-279.

2. Degenhart : *Tamerlan in den Literaturen westlichen Europas*, etc., p. 254.

3. *L'Histoire de la Décadence de l'Empire grec par Calchondile, Athénien. De la Traduction de B. de Vigénère, Bourbonnais, Paris, chez la veuve Mathieu Guillemot, 1632, 1<sup>o</sup>.*

4. Degenhart : *Tamerlan in den Literaturen*, etc., p. 257.

scription of this conqueror more than that of Chalcondyles. In the latter historian the Sythian is proud, ferocious, hot-tempered, cruel and arrogant, but Du Bec presents a more civilized, more humane creature : « Ainsi nous partismes, après avoir le Prince (Tamerlan) assemblé tous les gens de marque de son armée pour leur conférer son dessein, et recevoir avis d'eux, ce que son *humanité* usoit constamment qui le faisoit aymer : car tant plus vous estiez esloignez de luy, c'estoit lors qu'il vous honoroit davantage » <sup>1</sup>. The defeat of Bajazet and the capture of his family is recorded in both histories. Chalcondyles says of this event : « En cette grosse deffaite demeura aussi prisonnier Moyse et presque tous les capitaines de Bajazet... D'autre costé la femme de Bajazet vint ès mains et les autres enfants de Bajazet comment tous de la même fortune » <sup>2</sup>. Pradon has supposed Bajazet's wife and son killed by Tamerlan before the opening of the play, leaving but one child, Astérie, to comfort the captive emperor. The source of this character will be seen later. Du Bec has Tamerlan dispose of the children by sending them to the Greek emperor : « Bajazet s'estant retiré à cheval hors de la troupe... tomba vif entre les mains d'Axalla... L'Empereur ne le traita point humainement ; mais en fit faire peu de compte. Les deux fils de Bajazet furent envoyez à l'Empereur Grec pour les faire nourrir » <sup>3</sup>.

Andronic is found in both Du Bec and Chalcondyles. In Du Bec he is one of the generals attending Tamerlan ; Chalcondyles makes of him a son of the fallen Greek emperor whose successor had imprisoned Andronic and had put out his eyes : « Au regard des Grecs, ils se suivoient presque tous à la guerre quelque part qu'il (Bajazet) allast, hormis Eme-nuel, fils de l'Empereur Jean ; et Andronic, auquel les yeux avoient esté crevez avec du vinaigre bouillant, et étoit gardé dans le palais de Constantinople ; mais quelque temps après

1. Du Bec : *Histoire de la Décadence de l'Empire grec*, p. 221.

2. Calchondile, XII, 71.

3. Du Bec, p. 243.



qu'il se vit aucunement amendé de la veu, il trouva moyen à l'aide de quelques-uns d'évader ; et s'enfuir en la ville de Galathie... d'où il se retira puis après divers? Bajazet à luy demander du secours pour rentrer en son héritage » <sup>1</sup>. Du Bec speaks of him as attached to Tamerlan : « De quoy l'Empereur fut averti, et après avoir conféré avecque Axalla et Andronicque, pour aviser où il devoit dresser la teste de son armée » <sup>2</sup>. In Act. I, scene 1 of Pradon's play Andronic explains that Bajazet had supported his brother's party in the struggle for the throne of Byzantium after the Greek emperor's death, while he besought Tamerlan's aid against Bajazet's forces. The difference between the treatment of this character by the historians arises from the fact that Du Bec does not assign any other rôle than that of general to Andronic, but Chalcondyles makes him the son of the Greek emperor and a refugee at Bajazet's court. The dramatist, borrowing from both sources, has kept the historical figure in part as Chalcondyles draws him ; but, instead of being blind and dependent upon Bajazet's favor, he is modeled after Du Bec's character with the attributes of Axalla, the first general of Tamerlan, and is attached by bonds of interest to the conqueror's army.

Chalcondyles shows the Greeks favorable to Bajazet : « Bajazet se mist à ordonner ses affaires ; et tout premièrement receut les Grecs à son amitié et alliance » <sup>3</sup>. Du Bec presents the Greeks as friendly to Tamerlan : « Il prit grand plaisir à voir ces beaux peuples... en ce temps là, ils estoient sous l'Empire de Trébisonde que les Empereurs grecs tenoyent. Le Prince fut receu partout fort humainement et nous apportèrent tout le secour de vivres qu'il ne peut au besoin » <sup>4</sup>. From this incident of Tamerlan's journey to Trebizond Pradon has gathered his fictitious character of

1. Calchondile, II, 34.

2. Du Bec, p. 269.

3. Calchondile, II, ch. 1, 34.

4. Du Bec, p. 213-216.



the queen of Trebizond who comes to Tamerlan's camp to be married to him.

Bajazet's attempted escape by means of an underground passage dug for him by the Turkish prisoners and the discovery of this plot (Act II, scene v) are described in Chalcondyles : « Quelques capitaines de Bajazet s'estans accointez des Mineurs de Thémir, trouvèrent moyen de les gagner sous promesse d'une grosse somme de deniers, qu'ils leur devoient donner pour creuser une cave s'allast rendre en cet endroit où leur maistre estoit gardé et l'enlever secrètement. Mais comme ils eurent commencé ceste besogne, la conduisant droit au pavillon de Bajazet et finalement fussent venus à faire jour ils furent aperceus et saisis » <sup>1</sup>.

The character of Bajazet as drawn from Chalcondyles maintains throughout the tragedy the same haughty unbending attitude ascribed to him by the historian : « Bajazet étoit d'un si fier et outrecuidé naturel et si présomptueux de sa suffisance, qu'il ne falloit pas d'avance de luy donner conseil car aussi bien ne l'eust il point receu » <sup>2</sup>. The love of Tamerlan for Bajazet's daughter and her affection for Andronic were lacking in history. For this sentimental episode Pradon was forced to turn elsewhere.

Magnon's tragedy of *Tamerlan et Bajazet* treats the subject as follows : — The play begins after the battle in which Bajazet lost his empire. Orcazie, his wife, and Roxalie, his daughter, are prisoners of Tamerlan. Thémir, son of Tamerlan, loves Roxalie and Tamerlan Orcazie. Bajazet, posing as an ambassador, comes to Tamerlan's camp to propose peace, asking at the same time the liberation of his wife and daughter. He is refused. There is a decisive battle in which Bajazet loses and is made prisoner by his Grand Vizir, Sélim, who delivers him to Tamerlan, asking for Roxalie as a reward for his treason. She loves Thémir and hates

1. Calchondile, XIII, 73.

2. *Ibid.*

Sélim. The latter assassinates his rival and is himself killed by Tamerlan in revenge. Orcazie sends a dagger to Bajazet with which he kills himself and then she herself dies from poison given her by Tamerlan's wife, Indartize.

Using this play as basis for the motivation of his tragedy, Pradon has eliminated the double love element, Tamerlan with Orcazie and Thémir with Roxalie, bringing Tamerlan to the situation occupied by Thémir in the earlier play. As rival to his love the character of Andronic is drawn partly from Chalcondyles and partly from Du Bec. The plot is thus simplified to the struggle of rivals for one woman's love and the solution depends apparently upon Bajazet. The idea of Bajazet's death by poison possibly was suggested by Orcazie's death in Magnon's play. The softening of Tamerlan's character so that he gives Astérie to his rival is suggested by Du Bec's gallant figure of the Sythian conqueror. Magnon made Roxalie a captive of Tamerlan as Pradon does with Astérie.

Certain situations in the development of the plot are strongly suggestive of Corneille and Racine. Evidently Pradon had them in mind when he arranged several incidents and it was for this reason, as well as for his borrowings from Magnon's play, that critics accused him of copying. Tamerlan's generosity at the end of the tragedy was probably suggested by the example of Auguste in *Cinna*. The *Princesse de Trebizonde* recalls *Hermione*. In *Andromaque*, Act. I, Pyrrhus promises to spare Andromaque's son if she will marry him; Tamerlan, in Pradon's work, will spare Astérie's father if she will marry him. *Andromaque*, Act IV, tells her confidante she will marry Pyrrhus and kill herself afterward; Astérie promises Andronic she will pursue the same course. Racine's Bajazet offers a closer parallel. Roxane loves Bajazet who is a prisoner in her power; Bajazet loves Atalide and hates Roxane. In Pradon's tragedy Tamerlan loves Astérie who is his prisoner but Astérie loves Andronic and hates Tamerlan. Pradon appears to have used the same



scheme only substituting for the female evil force a masculine character. Atalide wishes to keep Roxane in ignorance of her love for Bajazet ; Andronic seeks to hide from Tamerlan his love for Astérie. Roxane offers to Bajazet the choice of marriage or death ; Tamerlan declares Astérie must marry him or her father will die. Roxane tells Bajazet of her love and is coldly received by him ; Tamerlan confesses to Astérie his love for her but she repulses him. From this similarity one is lead to believe that Pradon was not unwilling to prop up his own play with material taken from his rival.

(c) *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

The tragedy of *Phèdre et Hippolyte* was produced at the theatre of the Hôtel Guénégaud, Jan. 3rd, 1677<sup>1</sup>. The circumstances of its presentation, the rivalry of the piece with Racine's *Phèdre*, its good reception by the public, for it was acted twenty-five times, once before their Majesties<sup>2</sup>, the cabal of Pradon's admirers, and the war of the sonnets brought to its author the notoriety from which he suffered thereafter. The history of the quarrel of the *Phèdres* has been mentioned heretofore. We must now point out the numerous borrowings which Pradon made from earlier dramatists, borrowings which allowed him to complete his tragedy in the phenomenally short period of three months. The subject had been treated by Euripides in his *Hippolytus*, by Seneca in *Phaedra*, by Garnier in his *Hippolyte* (1573), La Pinelière in *Hippolyte* (1635), Gilbert in *Hippolyte* (1646), Quinault in *Bellérophon* (1665), Bidar in *Hippolyte* (1675), and by Racine in *Phèdre* (1677).

The sources given in the preface are the Greek and Roman tragedies on the same subject and the *Tableaux* of Philostratus : « Ainsi j'avoue franchement que ce n'a point esté un effet au hazard qui m'a fait rencontrer avec M. Racine,

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 47.

2. Jan. 24, 1677, see La Grange : *Registre*, p. 187.



mais un pur effet de mon choix ; j'ay trouvé le sujet de Phèdre beau dans les Anciens, j'ay tiré mon épisode d'Aricie des *Tableaux* de Philostrate, et je n'ay point veu d'arrêt de la Cour qui me défendit d'en faire une Pièce de Théâtre... Je n'ay point parlé icy de la conduite de cet Ouvrage ; elle a esté généralement trop approuvé, quoy que je me sois un peu éloigné de celle d'Euripide et de Sénèque » <sup>1</sup>. The sources are rather in the *Phèdre* and in certain other works of Racine but Pradon can claim Euripides and Seneca as first source for his background, for they first used the legend ; yet the similarities to Racine's version, the numerous borrowings from his situations, not to mention his verse, make it certain that Pradon had advance information how the rival play was constructed and profited thereby. He owed very little to Euripides ; to Seneca he is more clearly indebted. Garnier Gilbert, and Quinault have all gone into the make up of this hasty and unworthy piece. The *Phèdre* of Pradon is not the incestuous creature of Racine but the affianced bride of Theseus, carried off by him, and created for an intrigue of the palace, the heroine of a « drame de mœurs » which ends badly for her. The scene is laid at Trézène as in Racine's tragedy. The plot develops as follows :

Act I, s. 1 : Hippolyte wishes to leave Trézène to escape the dire manifestations of the gods and the tender glances of Phèdre. He has a certain regret at departing.

s. 2 : Hippolyte makes known to Aricie his love for her. She is pleased but reproaches him for not accepting Phèdre's friendship.

s. 3 : Phèdre tells Aricie of her love for Hippolyte. She intends to spread the report that Thésée is dead so that Hippolyte may marry her.

1. Preface of *Phèdre et Hippolyte* ; see Voltaire's opinion of this play in his preface to *Mariamne*.

- s. 4 : Aricie decides that Hippolyte must depart.
- Act II, s. 1 : Aricie warns Hippolyte of Phèdre and urges him to depart.
- s. 2 : Phèdre chides Hippolyte with lack of affection and begs him to stay and protect her.
- s. 3 : Aricie insists he must leave.
- s. 4 : Announcement of the arrival of Thésée.
- s. 5 : Phèdre flees to her room, afraid to meet him.
- s. 6 : Thésée arrives and orders Phèdre brought to him.
- Act III, s. 1 : Phèdre has observed that Aricie loves Hippolyte from the urgent appeals the girl makes that Phèdre abandon her love for him.
- s. 2 : Thésée has been informed by the Oracle at Délos that his son will be his rival. He has decided to marry him to Aricie and begs Phèdre to assist in the project.
- s. 4 : Phèdre offers to Hippolyte the young Helen as a suitable wife ; Aricie is destined for her brother. At this news Hippolyte declares his love for Aricie. Phèdre is so enraged that she threatens the death of her rival.
- Act IV, s. 1 : Thésée suspects Phèdre and decides to banish his son whom he believes his rival.
- s. 2 : Phèdre intercedes for her lover. She leads Thésée to believe that his son has declared his love for her.
- s. 3, 4 : Aricie has been imprisoned in Phèdre's room. Hippolyte begs Phèdre upon his knees for the release of Aricie and urges her to be faithful to his father.
- s. 5 : Thésée surprises him in this position. Angered he banishes him from the kingdom, calling down upon him Neptune's vengeance.
- Act V, s. 1 : Phèdre asks pardon of Aricie.
- s. 2, 3 : Aricie denounces Phèdre to Thésée, who, seeing his error, gives orders for his son's recall.

s. 4 : Phèdre has fled from the court in her chariot to follow Hippolyte.

s. 5 : Idas brings the news of Hippolyte's death and relates how Phèdre killed herself when she came upon Hippolyte's lifeless body.

Pradon has not followed Euripides or Seneca in making Phèdre the « fille enlevée » by Thésée. With this change the tragedy becomes no longer the struggle between passion and the will of the gods as in the Ancients, nor the internal struggle of love and jealousy as in Racine. Pradon introduces these elements of love and jealousy but they are established at the beginning of the play and do not advance the action. The plot hinges on the fact that Aricie is both « confidente » of Phèdre and the « amante » of Hippolyte. This role is therefore different from that of Oenone in Racine's play, and in Euripides the latter character does not exist. Pradon in his preface says : « J'ay tiré mon episode d'Aricie des *Tableaux* de Philostrate ». M. Deltour suggests that the character of Aricie does not come from Philostratus but more probably from the report abroad about this character in Racine's play of which Pradon must have had certain advance information <sup>1</sup>. M. Mesnard <sup>2</sup> cites a passage of Philostratus from which he says Racine derived his character. Probably Pradon had in mind this passage when he conceived his Aricie : « On estime que ce lieu fut ainsi appelé d'une belle jeune demoiselle de la contrée d'Attique, nommée Aricie, de laquelle Hippolyte s'étant enamouré, l'amena en Italie, où il l'épousa ». It is noteworthy that Pradon in his cast of characters refers to her as « Princesse de la Contrée d'Attique ». The part she plays in the intrigue suggests the character of Atalide in *Bajazet*. She loves Bajazet who is himself beloved by her mistress Roxane. Atalide was the confidante in fact if

1. Deltour : *Les Ennemis de Racine*, p. 308.

2. Paul Mesnard : *Œuvres de Racine*, édition *Grands Ecrivains*, III, 301.



not in name of Roxane. The following scenes suggest plagiarism :

*Phèdre* (Pradon), Act III, s. 1... *Bajazet*, Act III, s. 6

*Phèdre* (Pradon), Act IV, s. 4... *Bajazet*, Act V, s. 5

*Phèdre* (Pradon), Act V, s. 1... *Bajazet*, Act V, s. 6

The character of Thésée in Pradon's version is too talkative. Neither Euripides nor Racine bring to the treatment of this person the lengthy recital of his adventurous wanderings, the glorification of his prowess, and the dull political maxims which Pradon puts into his mouth.

Phèdre is a cold character ; her declaration of love is banal ; she does not lead the discourse up to the point where psychologically she should reveal her heart. In this treatment there is nothing of the manner of Racine, nor of Euripides either. She is too obvious. The idea of Phèdre, mistress of Thésée, not the incestuous figure of Racine, was suggested to Pradon either by Bidar's *Phèdre* or by the same character in Gilbert's play, *Hippolyte ou le Garçon insensible* (1646), where Phèdre is the mistress of Theseus :

(Gilbert's *Hippolyte*) Act. I, s. 2 :

- PHÈDRE. — La Terre pour luy manquera de Maîtresse.  
PASITHÉE. — Il a pris dès longtemps le nom de vostre-époux.  
N'êtes-vous pas sa femme ?  
PHÈDRE. — Ainsi le croit la Grèce.  
PASITHÉE. — Quoy, n'avez-vous pas fait une sainte promesse ?  
N'avez-vous pas donné vostre cœur, vostre foy,  
Pris les Dieux à tesmoins d'estre Espouse du roy.  
Jusques sur les autels, fait luire vostre flame ?  
PHÈDRE. — Encor qu'il ait ma foy, je ne suis point sa femme.

To this conception Pradon added such notions of Racine's queen as he was able to glean from hear-say with borrowings from the Roxane of *Bajazet*. Theatrical tricks like concealing of rival in the boudoir of her enemy and false suggestions made to surprise secrets from others were common. Racine made use of them in *Bajazet*, Act III, scene 6, and in

*Mithridate*, Act III, scene 8, but he knew how to use them to advantage.

Hippolyte is in Pradon's play the principal character. Phèdre divides the interest of the piece with him but she remains always in a somewhat secondary role. Departing from Euripides and Seneca, where Hippolytus is only concerned with heroic exploits and the cult of Diana, Pradon made him beloved by Phèdre and in love with Aricie. He has not the horror of Racine's character at the sight of the incestuous Phèdre but merely a coldness for his father's mistress. Pradon's attempt to combine the Hippolyte, happy in the pleasures of the chase, untouched by the fires of love, of the older dramatists with the *Hippolyte amoureux* is unconvincing and the character is far from Euripides and the Greeks.

Quinault's tragedy of *Bellérophon* (1665) in certain scenes shows a marked similarity to the motivation of Pradon's play. Stenobée is beloved by Proétus, king of Argos. She, however, loves *Bellérophon* who is loved by Sténobée's sister, Philonoé. Stenobée, wishing to remove Bellérophon from the power of Argos, begs the king to send him away. (Act I, s. 3.) This recalls Aricie's attempt to take Hippolyte away from Phèdre's influence. Stenobée asks her confidante to find out whom Bellérophon loves. (Act I, s. 4.) Thésée desires Phèdre's assistance in discovering his son's love. Philonoé, sister and rival of Stenobée, declares her love to *Bellérophon*. (Act II, s. 4.) Aricie does the same with Hippolyte. Stenobée imprisons Bellérophon in a fortress to keep him from her rival Philonoé. (Act V.) Phèdre imprisons Aricie in her room from jealousy of Hippolyte's love.

In Act I, s. 1 Pradon mentions the supernatural element which, under the guise of a serpent, glided over the altar where Hippolyte was sacrificing. This incident occurs in Garnier's <sup>1</sup> play of *Hippolyte*. Its origin is probably the recital of Laocöon in Virgil's *Ænéid* (Book III, 200-293).

1. Robert Garnier : *Œuvres complètes*, édition Foerster, Heilbron, 1882-4.

A certain similarity to Racine's treatment of the subject and occasionally to his verse is apparent in Pradon's work. The short dialogue between Hippolyte and Idas in Act I<sup>1</sup> concerning the whereabouts of Thésée suggests a similar theme in Racine's play<sup>2</sup>. The relation which Racine's Phèdre makes of her efforts to fight against her guilty passion<sup>3</sup> is found in Pradon's treatment<sup>4</sup>, although there is of course a different conception of the character of Phèdre. The influence of the goddess Venus in Phèdre's downfall<sup>5</sup> suggests Racine's use of this element<sup>6</sup>. Pradon's Phèdre urges Hippolyte to remain at the court<sup>7</sup> just as in the rival tragedy<sup>8</sup>. It is worthy of note that not only do similar situations and apparent imitations of the verse occur but also that these similarities are found in identically the same acts and scenes in the two plays. Sometimes the parallel situations are pushed ahead in Pradon's tragedy, due to the difference of exposition, while in Racine's they follow later. An example of this is found in Hippolyte's monologue where he states his reasons for leaving. Racine placed it in his third act<sup>9</sup>, and Pradon, following a similar idea, has put it in his second act<sup>10</sup>. These resemblances in subject matter, versification, and order of composition point suspiciously to an effort on Pradon's part to copy his rival through the medium, probably, of information furnished him by friends or current gossip about Racine's forth-coming work.

The whole tragedy is so full of passages which recall earlier plays on the same subject that it is difficult to decide

1. Pradon : *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, Act. I, s. 1., lines 68-70.

2. Racine : *Phèdre*, Act. I, s. 1., lines 6-8.

3. *Ibid.*, Act. I, s. 3, lines 286-296.

4. Pradon : *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, Act. I, s. 3, lines 262-283.

5. *Ibid.*, Act. I, s. 3, lines 279-283.

6. Racine : *Phèdre*, Act. I, s. 3, lines 276-285.

7. Pradon : *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, Act. II, s. 2, lines 437-442.

8. Racine, *Phèdre*, Act. I, s. 5, lines 584-594.

9. *Ibid.*, Act. III, s. 5, lines 933-939, 945-946.

10. Pradon : *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, Act. II, s. 2, lines 454-455, 468-473.



just what is original in the work. Space does not allow of quoting in full all the parallels, but those who care to turn to the works of Euripides, Seneca, Garnier, Gilbert, and Racine will find many places in which Pradon has apparently copied the thought and often the manner of expression of his predecessors. A comparison of the following scenes will justify this statement :

|                                         |               |                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pradon's <i>Phèdre</i> , Act II, s. 2 : | see           | Garnier's <i>Hippolyte</i> ,<br>I, lines 1259-1261.                                             |
| — — —                                   | IV, s. 6 :    | modeled upon Racine's<br>work, Act I, line 1168.                                                |
| — — —                                   | IV, s. 6 :    | (last speech of Thésée) see<br>Seneca, V, lines 942-955                                         |
| — — —                                   | IV, s. 2 :    | modeled on Racine's work,<br>for the same treatment<br>is not found in the other<br>dramatists. |
| — — —                                   | IV, s. 4, 5 : | see <i>Bajazet</i> , Act V, s. 5, 6.                                                            |
| — — —                                   | V, s. 3 :     | see Racine's <i>Phèdre</i> , Act V,<br>s. 5, lines 1419-1434.                                   |

The last scene where the recital of Hippolyte's death occurs is made up of numerous borrowings : Seneca, Act V, lines 997-1003, 1005-1007, 1032-1034, 1090-1091 ; Garnier, Act V, lines 1965, 1991, 1999-2004, 2028-2033 ; Gilbert, Act V, s. 4 (suggestive treatment) ; Racine, Act V, s. 6, lines 1513-1527, 1541-1543, 1560-1562.

(d) *La Troade*.

This tragedy was represented for the first time at the Théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, Tuesday, Jan. 17th, 1679<sup>1</sup>. The stage decorations are given in the *Mémoire de Mahelot*

1. Frères Parfaict ; *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 138.

as follows : « Théâtre est un camp, des tentes. L'optique est une ville ruinée, un fleuve devant » <sup>1</sup>. The misfortunes of Priam's family after his death and Troy's fall had been previously given upon the French stage by Sallebray, *La Troade*, 1640, by Racine in *Andromaque*, 1667, as well as by Garnier and many others. In ancient literature Euripides had twice treated the subject, in his *Hecuba* and again in *Andromacha*, and Seneca's *Trojan Women* combined the two earlier plays into a new one. It is upon the Roman play that Pradon in his préface claims to have constructed *La Troade* : « *La Troade* est un ouvrage trop fameux chez les anciens, pour n'estre pas connue des modernes. Euripides la fait de deux manières, que Sénèque a rassemblées en une. J'ai suivi l'ordre de ce dernier qui a compris l'*Hécube* et *La Troade* d'Euripide dans la sienne » <sup>2</sup>. The author has followed Seneca's play for the most part ; yet he has not been loath to borrow when necessary from the earlier Greek tragedies of Euripides, so that the three plays of antiquity can be regarded as the sources.

The plot develops as follows : Hecube, lamenting Priam's death and Troy's fate, hopes her daughters may soften the hard heart of the Greeks. Polixène, allotted to Pyrrhus, expresses her hatred for him and her affection for her lover, the dead Anténor. Andromaque and Hécube are to become prizes of Ulysse. Andromaque makes known to her mother and sister the hiding place of Astyanax in his father's tomb. Pyrrhus informs her that Ulysse wishes to sacrifice her son for the safety of the Greeks. Pyrrhus, however, loves Andromaque and is told by his confidant that Ulysse loves Polixène. (Act II). Ulysse, knowing of Pyrrhus's love, decides to humble the proud youth by holding Andromaque as hostage. To acquire Polixène he must secure Astyanax and by threaten-

1. H. C. Lancaster : *Le Mémoire de Mahelot, Laurent et d'autres décorateurs de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne et de la Comédie-Française*, Paris, Champion, 1920, p. 121.

2. Preface of *La Troade*.

ing the death of the boy he can compel Pyrrhus to deliver Polixène to him as reward for sparing Andromaque's son. Polixène begs Ulysse to save her from Pyrrhus and receives his promise to do so. When the fate of Astyanax becomes known to Pyrrhus, he confronts Ulysse with the verdict of the oracle wishing the death of Polixène to appease the spirit of Achilles. Ulysse argues against this so fervently that he discloses his love to Pyrrhus (Act III). Ulysse then tries to find out from Andromaque where her son is hidden. She declares he is dead. The angry Ulysse is about to order the destruction of Hector's tomb when she makes known her son's hiding place. Polixène and Andromaque both ask pity for the boy but Ulysse acknowledges he must possess him in order to save Polixène. Hécube likewise implores Pyrrhus to save the boy. This makes a difficult situation for Pyrrhus who must lose Polixène if he saves the boy, and if Ulysse will not give up Astyanax, he will fail in his attempt to win Andromaque. (Act IV). Hécube announces to Polixène the fate awaiting her. When Pyrrhus sees her distress he takes pity on her and decides to spare her but word comes that Ulysse has so inflamed the heart of the Greeks that they clamor for the death of the child. Pyrrhus decides to try a last time to influence Ulysse. (Act V). The Greeks have been so terrified by the appearance of Achilles' shade that they clamor for the death of Astyanax and Polixène. Ulysse and Pyrrhus plan to deceive them and save their victims but to no avail. Polixène and the boy are lead away to death and Hécube is left to hear from her servant how Astyanax sprang to death from the tower without waiting for Ulysse's fatal blow and how Polixène killed herself, for Pyrrhus was too weak and disheartened to strike her.

Though Pradon acknowledges he owes considerable to Seneca's version of the story, there are several obvious similarities to the Greek versions. Act I opens with Hecube's lament as in *Troades* :



- s. 2 : Polixène's attempt to learn her fate from her mother follows Seneca ; Hécube's confidence in Ulisse is reminiscent of Euripide's *Hecuba*.
- s. 3 : Andromaque learns of the disposition to be made of the captives. This scene is found in Seneca but there Helen imparts the information.
- s. 6 : Pyrrhus's love for Andromaque is shown in Euripides' *Andromacha*, also in the *Odyssey*, IV, 7-9, but Ulisse's love for Polixène is a new element.
- Act II, s. 2 : Polixène's appeal to Ulisse to save her family is new material but recalls Hecuba's plea to Odessyus in Euripides's play of the same name.
- s. 3 : The dispute between Ulisse and Pyrrhus comes from Seneca. Even there Pyrrhus accuses Ulysse of loving Polixène.
- Act III, s. 1 : Astyanax's place of concealment recalls Seneca.
- s. 2, 3 : Ulisse's discovery of the hiding place by threatening to destroy it is to be found in Seneca. Euripides in his *Andromacha* has Menelaus seek and find the boy.
- s. 5, 4 : Hécube begs Pyrrhus to save her daughter. A similar scene occurs in *Hecuba* where Odessyus is brought by Hecuba to save Polixène.
- s. 8 : Despair of Hécube is found in *Troades* and *Hecuba*.
- Act IV, s. 4 : Pyrrhus comes to lead away Polixène. The same scene occurs in Seneca.
- s. 5 : The weakness of Pyrrhus before Polixène's distress is suggestive of the last part of *Troades*.
- Act V, s. 4 : The despair of Hécube recalls Euripides' play of the same name.
- s. 6 : Hécube's final lament is patterned after Seneca.

The new element which Pradon has introduced into this subject is Ulysse's love for Polixène. Anticipating the criticism such a deviation from history would arouse, he attempts to justify his fiction by a long explanation in his preface :

J'ai préféré le vrai-semblable au vrai dans ma catastrophe, sans m'écarter en cela de la conduite de Sénèque, qui fait précipiter le fils d'Hector de son propre mouvement. Si Sénèque a ménagé en cela la gloire d'Ulysse J'ai voulu ménager à mon tour, malgré Euripide, celle de Pyrrhus en luy épargnant le crime de la mort de Polixène puisqu'elle se frappe elle-mesme de l'épée que la pitié fait tomber des mains de Pyrrhus. J'ai donné à cette Princesse un grand mépris de la vie et un grand désir de la mort, pour la conduire à cette action. Je lui ai donné mesme un amour épisodique pour un jeune Anténor, que je suppose avoir esté tué par la main de Pyrrhus, et non pas cet Anténor dont Virgile parle au second Livre de l'*Enéide*... Mais pour conduire Ulysse et Pyrrhus à la catastrophe, et pour adoucir leurs caractères, j'ai supposé qu'Ulysse avoit conceu un amour secret pour Polixène et Pyrrhus pour Andromaque : L'amour de Pyrrhus est véritable et connu, mais on m'a disputé celui d'Ulysse. Il me semble cependant qu'il n'est pas fort éloigné du vrai-semblable, qu'Ulysse qui étoit un des plus galans hommes de la Grèce, eût pris un peu de tendresse pour une Princesse aussi aimable que Polixène puisque Achille... avoit eu ce même penchant. L'exemple mesme d'Agamemnon, que quelques auteurs disent avoir épousé Cassandre pouvoit autoriser ses desseins sur Polixène <sup>1</sup>.

The borrowing of lines from the older dramatists is suggested in the preface : « J'avertiray seulement en passant que j'ay beaucoup emprunté de Sénèque, et même d'Euripide : Leurs peintures m'ont paru si belles et vives qu'en ayant d'abord traduit quelques-unes, cela m'a engagé insensiblement à faire la pièce entière ». The following selections show how close Pradon ran at times to the original.

Act. I. s. 1 :

HÉCUBE. — Dieux ! quiconque se fie à l'orgueil d'un Empire,  
Aux pompes d'une Cour que la fortune attire.

Que de ces tristes lieux il approche, et qu'il voye  
Les misères d'Hécube et les cendres de Troye.

1. Preface of *La Troade*.

Seneca, *Troades*, opening scene :

HECUBA. — Quicumque regno fidit et magna potens  
dominatur aula nec leves metuit deos  
animumque rebus credulum lætis dedit,  
me videat et te, Troia <sup>1</sup>.

HESIONE. — Si les yeux d'Andromaque, ou ceux de Polixène  
Rallumoient chez les Grecs le feu des yeux d'Hélène <sup>2</sup>

HECUBA. — Hic Hectoris coniugia despondet sibi,  
hic optat Heleni coniugem, hic Antenoris <sup>3</sup>.

HÉCUBE. — Hélas ! que Priam mort est heureux aujourd'hui  
Priam a vu tomber son Empire avec lui  
Il jouit du repos que l'on trouve aux lieux sombres  
Il est avec Hector chez les heureuses ombres <sup>4</sup>.

HECUBA. — Non est Priami miseranda mei  
mors, Iliades. Felix Priamus  
dicite cunctæ, liber manes  
vadit ad imos, nec feret umquam  
victa Graium cervice iugum <sup>5</sup>.

PYRRHUS. — Achille seul prit Troyes, et vous l'avez détruite <sup>6</sup>.

PYRRHUS. — Illum vicit pater, vos desuistes <sup>7</sup>.

PYRRHUS. — Vous voulez donc, Seigneur, prendre soin de sa vie,  
Vous qui fîtes périr la triste Iphigénie  
Vous qui d'Agamemnon endureit le cœur  
Et qui contre sa fille armâtes sa vigueur <sup>8</sup>.

PYRRHUS. — Dubitatur et iam placita nunc subito improbas  
Priamique natam Pelei nato ferum  
mactare credis ? at tuam natam parens  
Helenæ immolasti <sup>9</sup>.

1. Seneca : *Opera tragica, Bibliotheca classica latina*, Paris (Didot), 1832, IX, 243.

2. Pradon : *La Troade*, Act. I, sc. 1.

3. Seneca : *Troades*, Act. I, lines 59-60.

4. *La Troade*, Act. I, sc. 1.

5. *Troades*, Act. I, lines 143-147.

6. *La Troade*, Act. II, sc. 3.

7. *Troades*, Act. II, lines 236-237.

8. *La Troade*, Act. II, sc. 3.

9. *Troades*, Act. II, lines 247-250.



ULISSE. — Mais pourrez-vous vous-mesme aux pieds de son  
[tombeau  
Sans pitié, sans horreur, répandre un sang si beau <sup>1</sup>.

ACAMEMNON. — Quid cæde dira nobiles clari ducis  
aspergis umbras ? <sup>2</sup>

PYRRHUS. — Je ne m'explique point, mais pour punir ce crime  
Son ombre jouira de plus d'une victime  
Et peut-être Pyrrhus luy prépare aujourd'hui  
Une offrande plus ample et plus digne de luy <sup>3</sup>.

PYRRHUS. — Quam si negas retinesque maiorem dabo  
dignamque quam det Pyrrhus ; et nimium diu  
a cæde nostra regia cessat manus  
paremque poscit Priamus <sup>4</sup>.

ULISSE. — Si le plaisir de craindre est sensible à vostre âme  
Dans ce funeste jour vous l'auriez eu, Madame,  
On avoit destiné vostre fils à la mort ;  
Mais de sa perte enfin rendez grâce au sort <sup>5</sup>.

ANDROMACHA. — Alios parentes alloqui in luctu decet ;  
tibi gratulandum est, misera, quod nato caves,  
quem mors manebat sæva præcipitem dabum  
e turre, lapsis sola quæ muris manet <sup>6</sup>.

HÉCUBE. — Hélas ! pouvais-je luy survivre ?  
Pourquoi m'empeschez-vous de mourir, de la suivre :  
. . . . .  
Qui dois-je regretter de toute ma famille ?  
Dois-je pleurer mon fils ? dois-je pleurer ma fille ?  
Mon pais, mon Hector, mes enfans, mon époux <sup>7</sup>.

HÉCUBA. — Quo meas lacrimas feram ?  
Ubi hanc anilis expuam leti moram ?  
Natam an nepotem, coniugem au patriam fleam ?  
an omnia an me solo ? <sup>8</sup>

1. *La Troade*, Act. II, sc. 3.

2. *Troades*, Act. II, lines 256-257.

3. *La Troade*, Act. II, sc. 3.

4. *Troades*, Act. II, lines 308-311.

5. *La Troade*, Act. III, sc. 2.

6. *Troades*, Act. III, lines 620-624.

7. *La Troade*, Act. V, sc. 4.

8. *Troades*, Act. V, lines 1169-1172.

HESIONE. — Alors le fils d'Hector d'un visage intrépide  
Montre au haut de la tour où mon maître le guide  
Une noble fierté qui brille dans ses yeux  
Luy fait lancer sur nous des regards furieux <sup>1</sup>.

NUNTIVS. — Incedit Ithacus parvulum dextra trahens  
... nec gradu sequi puer  
ad alta pergit moenia ut summa stetit  
pro turre, vultur huc et huc acres tulit  
intrepidus amino <sup>2</sup>.

THRASILE. — Et l'on voit d'un enfant la ferme contenance,  
Ebranler tout un camp par sa noble assurance,  
On l'admire, on le plaint <sup>3</sup>.

NUNTIVS. — Moverat vulgum ac duces  
ipsumque Ulixem non flet e turba omnium  
qui fletur <sup>4</sup>.

THRASILE. — Une fierté modeste, une noble pudeur,  
Une démarche libre, un air plein de grandeur,  
Et sur tout sa jeunesse où brilloient mille charmes  
Nous frappe, nous émeut et nous tire des larmes <sup>5</sup>.

NUNTIVS. — ipsa deiectos gerit  
vultus pudore, sed tamen fulgent genæ  
magisque solito splendet extremus decor.  
.  
.  
.  
stupet omne vulgus...  
... hos movet formæ decus.  
hos mollis actas, hos vagæ rerum vices <sup>6</sup>.

(e) *Statira*.

The tragedy of *Statira* was presented the last of December, 1679, at the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne <sup>7</sup>. The plot

1. *La Troade*, Act. V, sc. 5.

2. *Troades*, Act. V, lines 1090-1095.

3. *La Troade*, Act. V, sc. 6.

4. *Troades*, Act. V, lines 1099-1101.

5. *La Troade*, Act. V, sc. 6.

6. *Troades*, Act. V, lines 1138-1146.

7. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XII, 156, note.

is as follows : Statira, daughter of Darius and widow of Alexander, loves Léonatus, one of the successors of this hero. Leonatus has joined forces with Antipater and other chieftains to dispute the government of the empire and the possession of Babylon with the queen, Roxane. Influenced by the treacherous Perdiccas she has usurped the throne holding it for the son she has born Alexander. Statira is a captive in her power. Roxane loves Léonatus and hopes to unite her ambition and her love by marriage with him. Statira loves Léonatus and spurns the love which the crafty Perdiccas offers her. He, hoping to force his marriage with her, decides to gain possession of Statira and Léonatus so that he can control Roxane and bring Statira to his side. Léonatus seeks parley with Roxane, proposes that they settle the dispute over the kingdom, and exacts the release of Statira. The jealous queen, urged by Perdiccas and her supporters, refuses to give up Statira. Cassander, unrequited lover of Roxane, decides to change parties and promises Léonatus to effect the release of Statira. Roxane suggests to Cassander to do away with her rival, but he, unwilling to jeopardize the success of his project and knowing that Roxane loves Léonatus, offers to kill him and rid the queen of her rival. This offer she refuses. Presuming to carry out the agreement made with Léonatus, Cassander betrays him. Both Statira and Léonatus fall into the power of Perdiccas who imprisons his rival and tells Statira that her lover, although alive, has turned from her and is willing to marry Roxane in order to save his life. Statira does not waver in her fidelity to Léonatus. Roxane informs Statira that she may see her lover but that to save him she must tell him she will marry Perdiccas. The meeting takes place in the presence of the queen and Statira goes lamely through her part, but Léonatus refuses to believe her. The news that the army of Antipater has arrived disturbs the plotters. Perdiccas accuses Statira of causing the down-fall of the kingdom and advises her to make her lover accept an al-



liance with the queen. This she promises to do, but, instead, the lovers plot to outwit Roxane. Their conversation is overheard by the queen, who, realizing the futility of all her efforts, decides that Léonatus and Statira must die. Perdiccas, fearing he will lose Statira, claims her as his prisoner. The queen is willing to make a bargain for the possession of Léonatus. This is agreed and Perdiccas takes Statira, but Roxane succeeds in gaining possession of her again through the efforts of Cassander and Peucestas. Perdiccas causes an uprising ; Roxane is frightened at the turn of events and decides to flee to Antipater ; Statira, thinking her lover dead, vows to kill herself rather than live on after him, a prey to Perdiccas's wishes. Meanwhile Léonatus escapes and joins her, but her oath is made and no persuasion will deter her. After her death Perdiccas and Léonatus swear to pursue Cassander and Roxane to avenge Statira.

The history of the quarrels of Alexander's successors is given in Plutarch's moral writings, in Justin, and Quintus-Cursius. Pradon acknowledges that these historians furnished him with his background. La Calprenède treated the subject in *Cassandre*, 1644-50, which was utilized by Magnon in his tragi-comedy, *Le Mariage d'Oroondate et de Statira*, 1647<sup>1</sup>. Pradon claims, however, to have treated the subject in a manner different from La Calprenède : « La mort de Statira causée par la jalousie de Roxane, est assez marquée dans Plutarque pour faire le sujet d'une tragédie ; et le caractère de Roxane est trop connu par ses cruautés, pour pouvoir rien altérer de la vérité. Ainsi quoyque M. de la Calprenède dans son Roman de Cassandre ait fait revivre Statira, je n'ay pas cru devoir suivre son exemple ; les règles du Poème dramatique estant plus austères que celles du Roman qui permet beaucoup de fiction, quand l'autre s'attache le plus qu'il peut à la vérité »<sup>2</sup>.

1. Paris, chez Toussaint Quinet, 1647, in-4°.

2. Preface of *Statira*.

The background of his tragedy he found in Plutarch's work as translated by Amyot. The other two historians he mentions offered him nothing that was not already present in Plutarch. In spite of his statement about La Calprenède's novel, the evidences of its influence and the borrowings which he made from its sentimental situations are numerous. Magnon's tragi-comedy too gave him certain situations. Basing his story on Plutarch's account with borrowings from La Calprenède and Magnon, Pradon arranged his material in a manner quite suggestive of Racine's *Andromaque* and *Britannicus*.

The only new element according to the author is the character of Léonatus ;

L'amour de Léonatus et de Statira font l'épisode et le nœud de cette pièce. Quelques-uns ont esté surpris que j'aye choisy Léonatus entre tous les successeurs d'Alexandre, pour amant de Statira ; mais j'ay eu des raisons assez fortes pour le faire. Léonatus étoit un Prince du sang d'Alexandre ; fort illustre par ses exploits. Il avoit commandé en chef plusieurs fois les Armées d'Alexandre ; il luy avoit sauvé la vie dans la ville des Oxydraques, et ce fust luy qui fust envoyé après la bataille d'Issus dans les Tentes des Princesses, pour les assurer de la vie de Darius qu'elles croyoient mort. C'est dans cette entrevue où j'ai fait naître leur tendresse, et cet endroit a paru assez beau. Il partagea l'Empire du Monde avec tous les successeurs d'Alexandre ; et quoy qu'il ne fasse pas une grande figure dans le Roman, il en fait une assez grande dans l'Histoire et il me doit suffire qu'il soit célèbre dans Quinte-Curse et dans Justin <sup>1</sup>.

The argument for Léonatus would have greater weight if Pradon had conceived this character on new lines. The historians to whom he refers mention the numerous military expeditions of this chief and Plutarch gives at some length his conquests but a Léonatus *amoureux* is not to be found in history. If Pradon flattered himself that his conception was original, his critics might well have pointed out that this figure was conceived upon the lines of Oroondate in La Calprenède's novel of *Cassandre*. The situations in which

1. Preface of *Statira*.

he is placed are likewise found in the novel. The dramatist has taken Oroondate and given to him the name of Léonatus found in Plutarch and in the novel, placed him in situations similar to those of Oroondate, and tried to justify this thin attempt at originality by a reference to his prototype in history. From Amyot's translation of Plutarch's *De la Fortune d'Alexandre* <sup>1</sup> he derived the following historical background : Roxane and Statira, the widows of Alexander <sup>2</sup> ; the quarrel between the chieftains over the division of the empire <sup>3</sup> ; Antipater's opposition to Perdicas <sup>4</sup> ; Leonatus's attention to the family of Darius after the battle of Issus—referred to in his preface as basis for his love episode <sup>5</sup>. Amyot also presents Roxane's hatred of Statira ; her retention of the rival queen with the aid of Perdicas, and her plan to hold the empire as regent, but her child has not yet been born <sup>6</sup>. The more numerous borrowings from La Calprenède's *Cassandre* <sup>7</sup> round out and embellish the meagre details furnished by Plutarch. These include Roxane's jealousy of Statira <sup>8</sup> ; Roxane's love for Oroondate which is similar to Roxane's passion for Leonatus <sup>9</sup> ; Statira held captive by Roxane and Perdicas <sup>10</sup> ; the persecution of Leonatus <sup>11</sup> ; the character of Peucestas <sup>12</sup> ; and the political faction opposed to Perdicas <sup>13</sup>. The cruelty of Roxane is quite definitely described : « Tu sçais que l'amour a effacé de mon âme tout ce qu'elle eut autrefois de bon et de raison-

1. Amyot : *Œuvres morales de Plutarque*, Paris, imprimerie Cussac, 1802.

2. *Ibid.*, XI, Traité I, 174 ; II, 193.

3. *Ibid.*, II, 403-4.

4. *Ibid.*, II, 407.

5. *Ibid.*, VII, 47-51.

6. *Ibid.*, VII, 155-156.

7. La Calprenède : *Cassandre*, Paris, 1648, chez A. de Sommaville, A. Courbe, Toussain Quinet, la veuve Nicolas de Suey.

8. *Ibid.*, vol. I, book I, 16 ; vol. II, book II, 300.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. I, book III, 386.

10. *Ibid.*, vol. I, book I, 16.

11. *Ibid.*, vol. I, book IV, 523.

12. *Ibid.*, vol. II, book III, 360.

13. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, book V, 410.



nable et tu n'ignorois point que ma jalousie arme bien plus puissamment ma main contre ma rivale... J'aime mieux qu'elle périclése, et que le monde entier périclése avec elle si je me voyais soumise à des déplaisirs si sensibles »<sup>1</sup>. The character of Perdiccas, his love for Statira, and his power near the queen<sup>2</sup>; his refusal to give up Statira<sup>3</sup>; Cassander's love for Roxane<sup>4</sup>; her effort to marry Statira to Perdiccas<sup>5</sup>, and Roxane overhearing the conversation between Statira and Leonatus<sup>6</sup> are all present in La Calprenède's novel. The capture of Léonatus and his imprisonment by Perdiccas recalls Oroondate's fate in *Cassandre*<sup>7</sup>. The request of Perdiccas for Statira<sup>8</sup> and his revolt in company with Cassander are to be found in La Calprenède's work<sup>9</sup>. Statira's confidante is called Cléone as she is in the novel<sup>10</sup>. There is also in the prose work a short account of the general Léonatus which probably gave Pradon the name for his chief male character<sup>11</sup>.

It seems clear that Pradon was indebted considerably more to the novel than he was willing to acknowledge. From Magnon's play, founded upon it he borrowed certain scenes such as Roxane confiding her love for Oroondate to her confidante (Act I, sc. 3), which he placed in the same position in his tragedy; the news of Oroondate's capture (Act I, sc. 4), resembling *Statira*, Act II, scene 7; Seleucas demanding the release of Oroondate which Roxane refuses (Act I, sc. 5), inserted by Pradon in Act I, scene 5, but the request is made by Léonatus. In Magnon's play (Act I, sc. 6, 7), Cassander declares his love to Roxane and is repuls-

1. *Ibid.*, vol. III, book II, 257, 269, 270, 275.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. V, book I, 134.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, book VI, 581.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. III, book II, 313, 328.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. V, book I, 150.

6. *Ibid.*, vol. I, book II, 186.

7. *Ibid.*, vol. V, book IV, 692, 693, 706, 707.

8. *Ibid.*, vol. V, book IV, 758-759.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. V, book VI, 992.

10. *Ibid.*, vol. V, book VI, 917.

11. *Ibid.*, vol. III, book III, 525.

ed. The same episode occurs in *Statira*, Act I, scene 2. In the older play Oroondate in his captivity welcomes the chance to speak with Statira (Act III, sc. 1), an incident which Pradon has used in Act IV, scene 3. Cassander and Perdiccas in Magnon's play take possession of the palace resolved to kill Oroondate (Act IV, sc. 7). A similar situation is found in *Statira* in Act V, scene 1.

The similarity to Racine's *Britannicus* and *Andromaque* is one of idea rather than of scenes. Nero gains possession of Junie whom he loves ; she is the fiancée of Britannicus, the rightful heir to the throne. (*Britannicus*, Act I). In *Statira*, Roxane holds her rival captive ; Roxane loves Léonatus who is in love with Statira. Narcisse, the « gouverneur » of Nero, urges him to resistance and plays the part of a traitorous informer. Pradon's character of Cassander is a traitor to Léonatus and to Roxane. In the interview which Nero permits Junie to have with Britannicus, he forces her to feign coldness. Roxane arranges a similar scene between Statira and Léonatus. Like Britannicus and Junie, who meet to swear fidelity and are found out later by Nero, Statira and her lover are discovered by Roxane. In *Andromaque*, Act V, Oreste, as ambassador, begs Pyrrhus for the release of the prisoner Astyanax ; Léonatus presents to Roxane a similar petition for Statira's liberty. Pylade loves Hermione, fiancée of Pyrrhus, but Pyrrhus is in love with Andromaque, his captive, and rejects Hermione's love ; Léonatus is in love with Statira and spurns Roxane ; while she, loving him, has nothing but scorn for the advances of Cassander. Pyrrhus will spare Astyanax's life if Andromaque consents to marry him ; Roxane will protect Statira if Léonatus ceases to love her rival. Roxane's jealousy, enflamed by the subtle Perdiccas, resembles Hermione's hate so played upon by her confidante, and in the end she turns against Perdiccas at the report of the death of Léonatus just as Hermione does against Oreste when she learns of the death of Pyrrhus.

(f) *Regulus*.

The tragedy of *Regulus* was performed for the first time on Sunday, January 4th, 1688 <sup>1</sup>. This subject had been treated previously upon the French stage, contrary to Pradon's inference, by Jehan De Beaubrueil <sup>2</sup>. The difficulty of confining the matter to the rule of the unities had, however, deterred most writers from attempting this attractive historial episode. Pradon congratulates himself for his success in the difficult situation : « J'ose dire que je me sçais un peu de gré d'avoir trouvé une route que plusieurs auteurs avoient vainement cherchée » <sup>3</sup>. The figure of Regulus, prisoner of Carthage, sent by the Phœnician republic to the Roman senate to obtain suitable peace terms or an exchange of prisoners in return for his liberty, his argument opposing the demands upon which even his life depended, his return to Carthage and death by torture is well known in Roman history <sup>4</sup>. Upon this theme Pradon built his tragedy, changing the historical facts, as he says, to accomodate the unities of time and place : « J'ai changé quelques circonstances à l'histoire, et j'ay mis la scène dans le Camp des Romains devant Carthage, et non pas dans Rome, pour conserver l'unité du temps et du lieu. Mais il eut esté bien fâcheux de laisser dans un éternel oubly la plus grande action qui se soit faite dans l'ancienne Rome, faute d'un peu d'invention. J'ay donc renvoyé Regulus dans le camp des Romains, pour les porter à la guerre qu'il va payer de sa vie plutost qu'à la paix » <sup>5</sup>.

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre françois*, XIII, 69.

2. Jehan de Beaubrueil : *Regulus*, tragédie, Limoges, 1583, imprimerie de Hugues Barbou, in-8°.

3. Preface of *Regulus*.

4. Cicero : *De finibus*, II, 20 ; V. 27. — Valerius Maximus : *Hist.*, IX, 2. — Seneca : *De Providentia*, III. — Diodorus the Sicilian : *Historia fragmenta*, liber XXIV. — Livy : *Periochæ ex libro XVIII*. — Polybius : *Hist.*, I, 34-41.

5. Preface of *Regulus*.



The action of the tragedy is as follows : The great Roman leader Regulus is besieging Carthage. In his undertaking he is assisted by the faithful pro-consul Metellus and the newly arrived troops commanded by Priscus. Since his wife's death Regulus has kept near him his young son Attilius. Fulvie, the daughter of Metellus, has come to the camp to aid her father and be near her lover, for she is beloved by Regulus and loves him in return. The weakened forces of Carthage have been lately strengthened by the arrival of the Lacedæmonian captain Xantippus who has succeeded in corrupting the tribune Mannius attached to the army of Regulus. Mannius loves Fulvia. Her coldness to his attentions and the knowledge of his rival's success make him break his none too loyal fidelity to his commander. Regulus upon a reconnoitering expedition is led by Mannius into an ambush, captured by the Carthaginians, and sent back to his camp upon parole to ask for the exchange of many prisoners in return for his liberty. If he is unsuccessful, death will be his reward, for he is bound by oath to return to his enemies. His chieftains and soldiers oppose his return ; but Regulus, putting the needs of Rome above personal feelings, unmoved by the tears of his son or the laments of his beloved Fulvie and his soldiers, succeeds in escaping from his camp by the aid of Metellus and returns to Carthage. Metellus storms the city and captures its outer bastions, but Regulus is killed by his captors in sight of his own soldiers.

The sources of this tragedy are few. Pradon used the general historical facts about Regulus as related by the historians mentioned heretofore : « J'ay tâché de conserver ce caractère de grandeur et de fermeté dans le plus austère Romain qui ait jamais paru, et l'on me flatte de l'avoir fait voir dans toute son étendue » <sup>1</sup>. He claims that he has imitated no writer in his manner of composition : « Je n'ay rien imité n'y emprunté de personne dans un sujet tout neuf

que les anciens et les modernes ont également respecté »<sup>1</sup>.

The character of the faithless tribune Mannius is found only in Florus, whom Pradon admits he has followed : « Le caractère de Mannius est fondé dans l'histoire ; et Florus, dans lequel j'ay pris mon sujet, nous apprend la révolte de ce Tribun qui fit soulever tout le camp des Romains contre Regulus. Je luy ay donné un interest d'amour et de jalousie qui sert à mon action principale »<sup>2</sup>. He has not only taken Mannius from the Roman historian but has utilized certain supplementary incidents as background for his plot. (It is worth noting here that the character of this tribune recalls Mantius in Corneille's *Cinna*.) The history of Regulus is given by Florus in the first book of his *Epitome Rerum Romanorum* (vol. I, liber II, ch. 2). The same account is to be found also in his *Epitome de Tito Livio*, I, 18, but here Mannius is given the name of Nantio. It appears then that Pradon made use of the *Epitome Rerum Romanorum* which had already been translated into French by Nicolas Coeffeteaux in 1618, with later editions in 1621 and 1647. The legend concerning Regulus and the serpent, not found in other historians, is used by Pradon in Act I, s. 1 :

Quand un Serpent affreux d'une énorme grandeur,  
Et dont les sifflemens répandoient la terreur,  
Parut, étincelant de fureur et de rage,  
Et voulut contre nous défendre le rivage.

Xantippus to whom Mannius betrays Regulus has in Florus the position of opposing general. The plot of Mannius has been built by the dramatist upon the faithless and untrustworthy character which this tribune shows in Florus's account, where only by the severity of Regulus was he held to his duty. Assuming, then, the hostility of the tribune to Regulus, Pradon puts him under the sway of Xantippus, adding to this animosity the spur of jealous love. The tower of Clypea

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

mentioned by Florus becomes with Pradon the tower in which Fulvie and the young Attilius were to await the outcome of the battle, had they followed Regulus's advice. The character of Fulvie is an invention of the author, for history records that the wife and children of Regulus were living at the time of his death. Nowhere is there any record that the consul Metellus had a daughter Fulvie. Pradon however acknowledges that he invented this character : « J'avoue que le caractère de Fulvie est entièrement de mon invention, et qu'elle fait l'épizode de ma Pièce, on l'y trouve amenée avec bienséance, et elle a des sentimens assez dignes d'une Romaine, pour ne pas faire rougir Regulus du dessein qu'il a de l'épouser après la prise de Cartage »<sup>1</sup>.

The introduction of a child upon the stage was not a novelty as Pradon claims. It had been used by Molière in *Le Malade imaginaire*. He justified himself for this novelty by saying :

Quelques-uns ont trouvé à redire que j'ai mis un enfant sur la Scène, mais j'ay suivi mot à mot l'histoire, et ce qu'en dit le fameux Horace :

Fertur pudicæ coniugis osculum  
Parvosque natos ut capitis minor  
Ab se removisse et virilem  
Torvus humi posuisse voltum<sup>2</sup>.

Ces vers me doivent fort justifier de cette nouveauté qui a produit un si grand effet, et qui a fait dire des choses si touchantes à Régulus, qu'elles font toute la beauté du cinquième acte<sup>3</sup>.

Pradon followed not history but the Ode of Horace quoted in his preface where the Roman poet represents Regulus refusing to be moved by the entreaties of wife and children. The dramatist enlarged the part played by the child in the life of his hero in order to produce the « choses si touchantes » which he admired.

1. Preface of *Regulus*.

2. Horace : *Carmina*, III, v., *De Milite Romano*, 41-44.

3. Preface of *Regulus*.



(g) *Scipion l'Africain*.

This tragedy was presented for the first time, Friday, the 22nd of February, 1697<sup>1</sup>. Its author either did not see fit to write a preface for it or the one he did write has been lost, for none is affixed to the original edition of the play or to subsequent ones. The subject of *Scipion l'Africain* had been treated previously upon the French stage by Desmarets in his tragicomedy, *Scipion*, 1639, by Puget de la Serre in his *Le Sac de Carthage* of 1643 and by Prade. The scene is laid in Scipion's camp near Zama. The plot is as follows : Scipion is encamped before Carthage, hoping soon to force the surrender of the city. The Carthaginians, torn by political strife, hard pressed for capable leaders to oppose the victorious Roman, have recalled from his Italian campaign Hannibal, the sworn enemy of Rome. By two victories which his men have won on the plains of Zama, the first over Hannon, and the second over Hamilcar, Scipion has acquired the prisoners Erixène, daughter of Hannon, and Ispérie, niece of Hannibal, promised in marriage by her parents to the Celtiberian chieftain Lucéjus, an ally of Carthage. Scipion has become enamoured of Ispérie but she does not return the affection. She loves Lucéjus in spite of his two years' absence from her. Erixène, although a captive of the enemy of Carthage, shows fondness for Scipion and hatred of Ispérie, partly from jealousy and partly from hospitality to the house of Barca unfriendly to her father's family. Her advances to Scipion are ignored.

Scipion is torn by conflicting sentiments : his glory demands the destruction of Carthage and its leaders, but this would destroy any sentiment which Ispérie might have for him. The knowledge of Scipion's love reaches

1. Frères Parfaict : *Hist. du Théâtre français*, XIV, 46.

Aurilcar who informs Hannibal. He, wishing to make a last attempt to stay the impending overthrow of Carthage, begs Scipion for an interview. The forces of Carthage are weak ; the soldiers have lost morale ; the exhaustive Italian campaigns have so sapped their vitality that Hannibal cannot put entire trust in them. If he can come to some agreement with the Romans, peace will be brought to the hard pressed republic, life and treasure will be spared, and the reputation of the two commanders will not suffer. These arguments he presents to Scipion at the meeting between the two in Scipion's tent. Finding the Roman inflexible on political questions, Hannibal decides to flatter his amorous desires by offering him the hand of his niece. Scipion suspects his secret has been betrayed yet he is still undecided as to the proper course to follow. Meanwhile Lucéjus, hearing that Hannibal has promised Ispérie to his rival, comes secretly to Ispérie, assures himself of her fidelity, promises to attack the camp and carry her away or die in the attempt. In return she promises to kill herself rather than submit to a marriage with Scipion. During the conference between the two opposing leaders, news arrives of Lucéjus's attack. Scipion imagines that Hannibal has asked for this parley to deceive the Romans and allow Lucéjus to catch the army off its guard. Angered at his, he breaks off the negotiations and prepares to sacrifice his love to the glory of battle. A call to arms goes forth. Lucéjus is overcome and made prisoner. Scipion, torn by pity for Ispérie's plight at the loss of her lover, by his love for her, and his ambition, conquers his conflicting emotions and bestows Ispérie upon Lucéjus.

The sources of the play are well enough established in Amyot's *Plutarch* to assume, in spite of the author's silence upon this point, that he found there the framework for his historical setting. A considerable amount of the sentimental machinery he owes to Desmarets' tragi-comedy of *Scipion*. The theme indeed recalls vaguely the two *Bérénice* of Corneille and Racine.

Plutarch in his life of *Scipion l'Africain* represents the hero as a character great in beauty of body and soul :

Car il n'avoit point seulement le cueur magnanime, et estoit excellent en toutes vertus, ains il estoit aussi d'une singulière beauté et belle proportion de tout le corps, ayant la face joyeuse, les quelles choses aident beaucoup à gagner la grâce de chascuns. Il apparoissoit aussi en ses façons de faire une majesté souveraine. La gloire doncques militaire estant jointe à tels dons de l'esprit et de nature, il estoit à doubter, s'il estoit plus agréable aux nations estrangères pour ses vertus civiles, qu'admirable pour ses vertus belliques <sup>1</sup>.

Such was the character that Pradon intended giving to his Scipion. The figure he produced falls far short of its prototype.

The character of Lucéjus has its historical source likewise in Plutarch as well as the love of this prince for Scipion's prisoner, but the name of the woman is lacking and there is but slight suggestion of Scipion's interest in her :

Mais il y eut une chose entre toutes qui luy augmenta grandement son los, et luy acquit grande benévolence, laquelle chose a esté célébrée de tous auteurs comme un exemplaire de toute vertu. On luy ament une jeune dame prisonnière, qui surpassoit toutes les autres en beautés, et bonne grâce, laquelle il fit garder diligemment et avec toute honnesteté ; ayant sceu un peu après, qu'elle estoit fiancée à Lucéius, prince des Celtibériens, il fit appeler l'espoux d'icelle qui estoit fort jeune homme, et la luy rendit entière et inviolée. Certes, c'est chose digne d'estre rédigée par escript, et Scipion luy mesme est digne de recevoir le fruit de si grande humanité et continence par les escrits de tous Auteurs <sup>2</sup>.

It is interesting to note that Pradon has kept the name of Lucéjus, merely making him supporter of the Cartheginians instead of the lukewarm ally of the Romans as Plutarch represents him. The setting is transferred from New Carthage in Spain, where Scipion then was, to the plains of Zama. This fact fixes Plutarch as the source of this incident and not Desmarets as will be shown later.

1. Amyot : *Vie des Hommes illustres de Plutarque*, IX, § IV

2. *Ibid.*, IX, § VII.



The numerous historical references scattered throughout the tragedy follow Plutarch's account. The reason for Hannibal's return from Italy and his meeting with Scipion are thus described by the biographer : « Cette perte et desconfiture estant entendue à Cartage, effroya tellement les manans et habitans, que les uns furent d'avis de rappeler quant et quant Hannibal hors d'Italie » <sup>1</sup> : and further :

Les Carthaginois... rappelèrent Hannibal hors d'Italie. Lequel estant hastivement retourné en Afrique, avant toutes choses il fut d'avis de parlementer avec P. Scipion touchant les affaires de la paix, soit qu'il redoubtast l'heureux succès du présent jeune homme, ou bien qu'il se déffist de pouvoir autrement secourir la chose publique de son pais, qui s'en alloit du tout en ruine. Parquoy on ordonna lieu pour parlementer ainsi qu'il avoit demandé ; là où estans venus, ils tindrent ensemble long propos touchant de finir les discordes. Finalement Scipion proposa à Hannibal de telles conditions, que par icelles il apparoissoit assez que le peuple Romain ne se faschoit pas de la guerre... Par quoy toute espérance de pouvoir faire appointement ostée, le colloque fut rompu <sup>2</sup>.

The battles in which Erixène and Ispérie were made captives are placed by Pradon at Zama. Plutarch mentions a battle between Hanno and the Romans taking place near Carthage : « Hanno, fils d'Amilcar, ordonne pour garder le pais voisin vint au-devant des Romains... Hanno fut vaincu dès la première charge, et tué avec une partie de ses gens » <sup>3</sup>. The Hanno referred to here is a son of Hamilcar and not the enemy of Hannibal as in Pradon's conception. The dramatist has mistaken this Hanno for the one mentioned by Livy (XXI, 3, XXIII, 12) who was an enemy of the Barcas. The battle wherein Hasdrubal was defeated is put at Utica by Plutarch and not, as Pradon does, on the plains of Zama <sup>4</sup>. Pradon makes reference, Act II, scene v, to the fate of Siphax brought to ruin by his love of Sophonisba. Here again

1. *Ibid.*, IX, ch. xxvii.

2. *Ibid.*, IX, ch. xxx.

3. *Ibid.*, IX., ch. xxiv.

4. *Ibid.*, IX, ch. xxv.

he has borrowed an episode from Plutarch <sup>1</sup>. Likewise in the same scene Scipion fears that Lucéjus by marrying Ispérie will thus be able to make a coalition with the African kings, Mandonius and Indibilis :

Vous pouriez soulever vingt Rois nos ennemis,  
Unir Mandonius avec Indibilis,  
Et suscitant à Rome une éternelle guerre.

These characters are to be found in Plutarch <sup>2</sup>, but in the biographer they were « deux petits roys d'Hespagne ».

There is no basis in history for the « Scipion amoureux ». This episode Pradon derived from the *Scipion* of Desmarets with the happy ending to the tragedy. Desmarets' tragedy carries a double plot. Since only the main story of Scipion's love concerns Pradon's tragedy, an outline of this treatment in the earlier play will suffice : Scipion besieges Carthagena. In this city there is a Spanish princess, Olinde, promised in marriage to Lucidan, Prince of the Celtiberians. Garamante, a Numidian prince, ally of Carthage and rejected suitor of Olinde, offers to deliver the city to Scipion for the reward of Olinde. Scipion accepts and becomes master of Carthagena. During the capture of the city Lucidan, hearing of Garamante's treachery, encounters him and dangerously wounds him. The captive Olinde is presented to Scipion who becomes enamored of her but her constancy to Lucidan is firm. Scipion is torn by conflicting emotions of love for her and the call of his ambition. He finally renounces Olinde, giving her to Lucidan upon whom he bestows liberty. From here the plot is concerned with Garamante and has no bearing upon Pradon's tragedy. From this outline it is evident that he copied his « Scipion amoureux » and the final renunciation of the conqueror from Desmarets, but Plutarch has influenced him to the extent of keeping the ori-

1. *Ibid.*, IX, ch. xxiv.

2. *Ibid.*, IX, ch. viii.

ginal name Lucejus instead of Desmarets' Lucidan. In fact Plutarch is the source for both works. What Pradon did not find in the biographer he borrowed from Desmarets. The character of Erixène so useless in Pradon's play must have been his own invention, for her counterpart does not appear elsewhere.

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## CHAPTER V

### A GENERAL CRITICISM OF PRADON'S PLAYS.

Boileau and his followers have insisted that Pradon was as dull as his plays were stupid. Yet the plays were accepted for production by the comedians of both the Théâtre Guénégaud and the Théâtre de Bourgogne; they were attended by the polite society of the court; they were revived — *Tamérhan* during the life-time of the author and *Regulus* in the succeeding century. We are told that they passed into the general repertoire of provincial troupes. How comes it, then, that they held their ground if they were such as their detractors represented them? The works of Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, de Visé, Thomas Corneille, Fontenelle, Boyer, Quinault, Longpierre, Madame Des Houlières, the abbé de Pure, Bensérade, l'abbé Genest, La Grange-Chancel, have not such great literary value that Pradon must take last place in the line of the century's dramatists. These were, however, dramatists of that day. Theirs were the plays the public witnessed. They were fellow-workers although not all of them companions of Corneille and Racine who gave us the masterpieces of the age and the others the shop-work of a period.

Arriving in Paris at a time of changing ideas in the conception of the dramatic appeal, Pradon was caught between two styles, that of the Cornelian manner upon which his youthful experience rested and the subtle psychological and emotional « drame intime » of Racine. In the first manner he

felt at home. The public, however, was tiring of Corneille's romantic figures ; life was no longer a strife between duty and love ; and, since conditions in governmental affairs were fixed, politics did not interest. The new order was accepted. An introspective, psychological study of the will and the emotions replaced the old external play of will against will, of emotion, be it of love or duty, acting independent of the dictates of personal security. Pradon had to adapt himself to this changed conception of the tragic muse, and succeed in the new manner he must to gain approval outside the circle of his friends. The admirers of the old Corneille liked and used him for their ends. They wanted plays which would give the old thrill and still have something of the sentimental and amorous. Pradon to please them attempted an adaptation of the Cornelian manner to this new method which he believed consisted in adding intricacy of situation to emotional effusiveness. Apparently cold himself, he thought emotion was represented by much speaking ; he misused the rhetorical tirade, forgetting that the tirade moves only through the excellence of the sentiment expressed and the beauty of expression. Of the latter he had little. In his plots, so burdened with their emotional rôles, his rhetoric chills and withers, or falls into a sentimentality which in a less stolid writer might have become « fadeur » or « douceur ». Pradon could not write mere prettinesses, for his Norman nature, his Cornelian taste for the heroic, and his lack of poetic skill prevented this. When he conceived characters like Amestris in *Pirame* or *Regulus* along the lines marked by Corneille, he is convincing. Motives like duty, love of country, jealousy, pride, valor, a subtle « politique » he controls with sufficient skill. Unfortunately he considered it necessary to introduce amorous romance and sentimental gallantry, thus spoiling his efforts by an insincere and graceless expression.

His characters develop not from a clash of emotions but from a shock of circumstances largely external to their own selves, which shows plainly when they are placed in conflict-



ing situations. Their speech runs to rhetorical protests of amorous feelings or to a sentimental wailing ; they argue and protest, but their protestations of love show no fire, no heat of intense desire. Where he should be short, almost abrupt and disconnected, Pradon is verbose and gallant ; his style recalls the novel *à la Scudéry* or the poetry of the salons in its studied courtliness. Boileau, familiar with Racine's manner, continually ridiculed Pradon's love-struck historical figures. The public and especially those retainers of the older salons arrived only late in the century at a complete sympathy with Racine's aesthetics. What they desired was either a « fade » gallantry *à la Quinault*, a tragedy of « grands frissons » after the manner of Corneille, or an intricate plot of surprises enlivened by a sentimental, amorous gentility of manner, expressed in easy flowing, inflated verse. Pradon, swinging between the old and the new, introduced now a little more of the Cornelian manner, now a little less and more of his rival's method. His treatment of the purely emotional was wholly stereotyped and limited, couched in a manner that his public could understand, offering a bit of all styles to please the « honnête homme ». This accounts for what popularity was accorded *Pirame et Thisbé*, *Tamerlan*, and *Regulus*. They combine many of the elements which delighted seventeenth century audiences of Pradon's day — an historical figure of forceful character plotting a glorious future and led hither and thither by the conflicting claims of a carefully analyzed love sentiment which is either sacrificed to honor or softened to pity for the victim of its wrath.

The poetry of the lines is almost all woefully flat and uninspired. Gallant and mannered, touched by occasional conceits and « préciosité », this verse carries the thought in a monotony of usually accepted phrases, stock inversions, and habitual rhymes. At times Pradon's muse soars on the wings of Corneille, then, exhausting its strength in its flight, falls to the ground unable to rise again. Only at rare moments are the lines sustained by any poetic beauty or vigor. He should have



confined himself to prose where his delight in complex plots and secondary episodes would not have suffered the limitations of poetry. The prose drama was, however, yet to come. In ability to construct a tragedy by knitting one scene to another, maintaining the interest of an audience by suspense or sharply contrasted situations, he was no less able than many of his contemporaries. He was careful to observe the Aristotelian rules as Dacier had translated them. Given a theme borrowed from antiquity, he adapted the characters to suit the courtly influence. Tamerlan, Hippolyte, Ulisse, Pyrrhus, Perdicas, Léonatus, Scipion are made first of all « galants hommes », types of the general social milieu in which their author felt at home, and as such they did not offend the « honnête homme », perhaps even winning his sympathy and approval. Pradon is careful throughout his prefaces to point out this aim of making his characters conform to social requirements. To this he added a sentimental love presumably of the heart but really cold and mannered. His characters debate their conduct, undecided whether to follow the dictates of their love-passion or the impulse of their ambition. They love and fear that their love is not returned; their faith in their mistresses is easily shaken, but doubt soon gives way to submission to the object of their love; they become sentimentally downcast at any temporary check. Their ultimate triumph comes not from their own efforts but from outside influences, either that of death, or a softening of the heart at the sight of death, so that cruelty disappears before a sense of pity and compassion.

*Pirame et Thisbé* shows all the marks of Pradon's method and the later plays are but variants of the same type. For us the interest is not in comparing these plays with present day standards but in attempting to judge them as the audiences of Pradon's day looked upon them. The critics evidently busied themselves with his first tragedy : « J'ai fait une épisode d'Amestris et de Bélus qui, quoy que fondés dans l'Histoire, sont des caractères de mon invention, aussi

bien que celui d'Arsace. Quelques-uns ont voulu dire que cet épisode l'emportoit sur le sujet principal, mais si l'on veut prendre la peine d'examiner leurs intérêts on verra qu'ils sont si bien mêlés avec ceux de Pirame et Thisbé, que toutes les démarches de ces trois personnes ne tendent qu'à rompre l'intelligence qui est entre ces deux amans, pour l'intérêt particulier de leur amour, et qu'enfin Pirame et Thisbé sont le terme et le point fondamental où aboutissent toutes les lignes de ma Pièce, comme à leur centre. Si Bélus conserve ses droits contre la violence d'Amestris, et si Amestris par sa politique et par son adresse le veut détourner du gouvernement de l'Etat, Pirame est l'objet qu'elle regarde, et Thisbé celui de Bélus ; et c'est par leurs différends qu'ils causent les cruels embarras de ces amans malheureux, qui attachent et qui intéressent toujours le spectateur jusqu'à la fin de la catastrophe. La critique même la plus sévère y a trouvé assez de conduite pour le Théâtre, et les âmes tendres y peuvent voir des sentimens de leur caractère » <sup>1</sup>. This criticism of contemporaries was true in regard to the relation of Amestris to the main story of *Pirame and Thisbé*. The queen, so similar to the feminine rôles of Corneille and suggestive of Roxane in *Bajazet*, is the best drawn character of the play. The willful woman bent upon preserving her power at all hazards, making her love a pendant to her political aspirations, could not fail to please the admirers of Corneille. Her vigor and force do not suffer as do so many of Pradon's female rôles from the love episode attached to her character. She remains throughout the scheming, ambitious, jealous queen of Babylon :

C'est un amour caché qui parle en politique ;  
Je le sens, je l'avoue, et je doute en ce jour  
Si mon ambition égale mon amour.  
Vois donc et reconnois mon âme toute entière ;  
Cette Amestris toujours si superbe et si fière,

1. Preface of *Pirame et Thisbé*.

Au seul nom de Pirame a changé de couleur  
Et pousse des soupirs qu'il arrache à mon cœur <sup>1</sup>.

Though driven on by her passion, she never wholly loses her queenly demeanor even when unrequited love leads her to the destruction of her rival Thisbé. Yet her love for Pirame has much of a political « *arrière-pensée* » controlling her character and her actions. She becomes a more real figure than the pale, indefinite Thisbé. She struggles against Bélus whose ambition runs counter to hers, and the conflict of aims in these two rather forceful characters throws the tragedy of the lovers into second place. For Pradon's time this political, amorous episode of Amestris against Bélus had more interest on account of its double motive à *la Corneille* than the story of the lovers. The poet tried to combine a struggle for political power with a sentimental love episode in the manner of the new school in order to obtain a balance pleasing to the public taste. Better instructed in these political roles than in the amorous ones, his best efforts went into the former, while the episode of the lovers fell into second place.

Bélus is a counterpart of the queen in lesser relief. As for Pirame, his indecision, lack of confidence in Thisbé, and general willingness to accept his fate must have found little favor with audiences. His abrupt parting with Thisbé (Act II, sc. 2) and his sudden appearance after his escape to urge Thisbé to flee leaves much to the imagination and presumes upon Thisbé's good nature. In fact the character of Thisbé is painted in such a colorless fashion that her simple, lachrymose quiescence drives away pity rather than incites it as the author intended.

The recital of the death of the lovers is badly arranged, due to a lack of understanding of the source of pity. The recital is made by Pirame's father, Arsace, at great length. Rhetoric abounds, but the lines fall coldly from his

1. Act. I, sc. v.



lips. A grief-stricken father could scarcely bring himself to speak at all of his son's death, or, if so, he would speak in short, disjointed phrases in which emotion would prevent effusive speech. Pradon had no conception of this, otherwise he would have chosen a more fitting character to carry the recital of the boy's death : « Quelques-uns ont dit que ce récit étoit trop pathétique dans la bouche d'un père, et que les grandes douleurs étoient muettes » <sup>1</sup>. It was not a question of the recital being too « pathétique » but of the lack of sincerity in it. The justification Pradon gives is beside the point, for it was not the description of the death which moved to tears but the fate of the lovers : « Je pourrois répondre que j'en ai des exemples et chez les Anciens et chez les Modernes ; mais enfin quand même ce seroit une faute de jugement dans mon ouvrage, je puis dire que je l'ai faite avec jugement et réflexion ; et ce récit a tiré tant de larmes et a fait un si grand effet, que s'il échappe à ma plume une seconde pièce de théâtre je souhaite de tout mon cœur qu'elle soit remplie de fautes de cette nature » <sup>2</sup>.

The play was well suited to win public esteem. It gave a picture of a willful, evil queen conceived on the lines of Corneille's works, with many political maxims, a clearly marked « politique », and a struggle for power over opposition. Interwoven into the political narrative was a story of two lovers whose unfortunate fate drew the sympathy of the sentimentally inclined. The young couple debated their love ; they were gentle and well-mannered victims of the rough Bélus and his crafty mother ; their death at the hands of cruel fate moved even the wicked queen and the headstrong Arsace to pity and fear of their own evil-doing. What plot could be more within the reach of the courtly, pleasure-loving, intriguing mind of the « honnête homme » ?

*Tamerlan* continues the method of its predecessor in a way

1. Preface of *Pirame et Thïsbe*.

2. *Ibid*.

more involved and less suggestive of Corneille. The author launched forth into the new manner of the gallant and « honnête » character whose ferocity is an external form covering a gentle and easily touched heart. The proud, fiery, resolute political rôle falls to Bajazet. Unmoved by favorable or unfavorable circumstance he continues to hate Tamerlan and dies with a curse upon his lips. He appealed to the audience by his fallen greatness and his resoluteness in adversity :

Croit-il par le retour d'une feinte clémence,  
Que j'oublie un moment ma haine et ma vengeance ?  
S'il pense me fléchir, il se trompe, Seigneur,  
Ses affronts sont gravez trop avant dans mon cœur <sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \*

Le Sort m'attache aux fers ; et moy dans ce malheur,  
Je veux perdre le jour, et tromper sa fureur <sup>2</sup>.

\* \* \*

Epouser Tamerlan, fais un plus noble effort,  
Ouy, perdons-nous plutost, et courons à la mort ;  
Astérie, est-ce ainsi qu'une servile crainte  
Te peut faire subir une indigne contrainte,  
Et dans quelque revers qui nous puisse accabler,  
Le sang de Bajazet doit-il jamais trembler ? <sup>3</sup>

Tamerlan, an historical figure too, playing the opposing role to Bajazet, begins likewise with a ferocity of character apt to drive away public sympathy. To overcome this Pradon acknowledges that he has made of the fierce Sythian an « honnête homme », now fiercely headstrong, now politely amorous, half way between the conqueror recorded in history and a hero of unrequited love. At the end, moved by Bajazet's death, he becomes quite tender and « raisonnable », bestowing his beloved Astérie on his rival. Such a strange motivation was

1. Act. I, sc. II.

2. Act. III, sc. I.

3. Act. III, sc. VI.

required by the choice of subject matter according to Pradon's method. The chief role, in order to gain sympathy, could not run counter to his love episode which was conceived on an equal footing with the historical episode. The sudden change in Tamerlan thus puts him among the misguided characters who realize by the effects of their handiwork what awful ruin they have wrought. This treatment little accords with our historical conception of this chieftain but Pradon states in his preface that history did represent a Tamerlan less brutal than that of Chalcondyles. By choosing such a figure and endowing it with the qualities of an « honnête homme », he made an appeal to his audience who wished to see greatness of soul expressed by great deeds. Tamerlan's magnanimous act is not dictated by moral heroism but by sentimentality. The public might accept this instead of the other conception.

The supplementary love episode between Astérie and Andronic is linked with the Tamerlan-Bajazet episode in such a way that it seems to throw into bolder relief these two characters. The interest is held by this intertwining of love and duty, desire for revenge and desire for possession which appeared earlier in *Pirame*. The same coldness of rhetorical phrase passes for emotional crises ; swiftly changing circumstances threatening ruin now to one, now to the other lover replace psychological study of character. The result is an episode of situations. The sympathy of the public goes to Astérie whose fate was so beyond her control. She is better drawn than Thisbé, more actively dominant in the play. She moves in a circle from which there seems no escape, if Pradon had not brought about a happy ending by Tamerlan's conversion. Bajazet's death was necessary to carry the plot to conclusion and at the same time to maintain historical accuracy. Though the public might admire his steadfastness, it would require his death as the logical course of events, but Astérie's death would excite too much pity, destroy any feeling for Tamerlan, the hero, and make a gloomy per-



formance. The sentimental interest must be left, thought Pradon, as he interpreted Racine's manner. In *Tamerlan* he deviates the most from Corneille. The plot is conceived after the manner of a novel ; Astérie and her lover, Andronic, are novelesque figures. His lack of decision is the pivot upon which the tragedy swings ; for had he been decided and forceful, he would have solved the situation, outshone Tamerlan, and destroyed the plot. He is amorous and rhetorical when confronted with a problem but rash and headstrong when coolness is needed.

Pradon's public felt doubtless in this tragedy the same call upon its sympathy as in *Pirame*. Will the heroine escape the vengeance of the jealous lover ; will he be faithful to her ; how will the lovers escape their fate ? Fortune turns now for and now against them ; Tamerlan's love and Bajazet's hatred were supplementary. The former is the evil tyrant softened by the effects of love ; the latter, the proud monarch beset by an evil fate, triumphing over it by death. All the characters, Bajazet aside, are « honnêtes gens ». Their speech is « dans l'ordre », their actions and motives well within the limits of the understanding. Sentimentality and gallantry make up a large part of the discourse. Suspense is well kept up throughout the play, and Astérie is a character of sufficient force to attract sympathy, Bajazet pity, and Tamerlan admiration for greatness of soul. There is argument, occasional psychological study of the emotions, protests of love, forlorn hope — all the qualities which the novel-reading « honnête femme » would enjoy and understand. What if the verses were flat and uninspired. The plot did not lag ; it was intricate ; the characters were gallant ; and sentiment abounded.

The tragedy of *Phèdre et Hippolyte* is so poor that one wonders how it could succeed for the space of time it held the stage. The rapidity of composition is evident throughout the piece. Frequent borrowings from classical writers, imitations of earlier works on the same subject, and tactless parallels

with Racine's earlier plays and rival tragedy, with verse of excessive mediocrity, make up one of Pradon's worst efforts, only exceeded by his last, *Scipion l'Africain*. The noble Greek and Roman figures are reduced to the level of court gallants, « précieuses » ladies of society, and a traveling philanderer returned to find his mistress playing tricks upon his fidelity. The action is needlessly complicated and its solution depends upon a stage trick, the imprisonment of the rival in Phèdre's room. A sentimental love episode is interwoven with another of jealous, unrequited affection. The struggle for mastery between the two makes the situations and brings death to the chaste Hippolyte. Rhetorical passages abound. The most emotional speeches give no thrill of warm-blooded passion. Pradon becomes more entangled in the new manner than before and the precepts of Corneille disappear. The romanesque, the « fade », and the gallant absorb the subject. The plot shows the same effort at equivocal situations, surprises, changing circumstances, so marked in the earlier plays. Phèdre is merely a petted woman of society who falls in love with a young man from proximity. His coldness and her jealousy of Aricie urge her to deceit, dissimulation, violence, and fraud. It is a petty tragedy of every-day life. Aricie, the pure maiden whose one desire is to save her lover from the wiles of the enchantress, is colorless and insipid, serving merely as an opposing figure to Phèdre. Thésée is a ridiculous character, suitable for comedy but out of place in tragedy. He returns from his adventures to find his mistress faithless. Although enraged at her deception, he apparently values her more than his son's affection and regard. Hippolyte is supposedly a lover of the solitary life, a hater of women but withal a gallant courtier whose shyness seems but a passing whim, for he becomes ardent, faithful, a tender lover indeed at the approach of Aricie.

The temporary success of this flat tragedy shows to what extent public taste would support the courtly, mannered gallantry and the insipid, rhetorical episodes of love and jeal-



ousy. Audiences were pleased to see an amorous Hippolyte who could sigh in genteel fashion for the « précieuse » Aricie. This plot of suspense held their attention. The jealousy of Phèdre, her desire for the love-struck youth, and the demure Aricie they could understand. The adventurous Thésée delighted the taste for romance and love of freedom from restraint. Hippolyte appealed as the type of « honnête homme », handsome, valorous in the fight, with enough shyness to make him interesting to the women of the salons, honorable, gallant, knowing how to speak in a gracious manner, and faithful in love. No wonder Racine despaired of success. Pradon put into his play the romanesque qualities sure to be admired by the average courtier with a love intrigue which held the attention by intricacy of plot and a mass of amorous verbiage plain to even the dullest.

In *La Troade* the influence of Corneille is again at work but only to a slight degree. Duty and obligation to his father's memory form the main part of the character of Pyrrhus, the proud conqueror, scion of an illustrious house. Love and power, jealousy of Pyrrhus, craftiness and moral instability make up Ulysse. The love of Andromaque for her son and her fidelity to her husband's memory are transferred from the classical tragedy-writers to Pradon's play. Corneille would have made a drama of conflicting wills, of ambitious rivalry for possession of the child in which Andromaque would have met a noble death. Not so Pradon. The public must have an episode of sentimental love, an intricate and romanesque plot which presented the familiar legend in a new light. Pyrrhus and Ulysse are endowed with the qualities of « honnêtes hommes ». They are willful but gallantly so. The struggle of conflicting aims and ambitions in the political sphere is transferred to the emotional, and the tragedy becomes a quarrel over the spoils of war, no longer political domain or rich booty, but the captive women, a conflict between duty and covetousness. To have effected an exchange of the prisoners would have been easy, but that meant sacrificing



intricacy of plot and, incidentally, the tragedy. This skein of cross-purposes served to keep up the interest in the final disposition of the Trojan women.

Andromaque's solicitude for her son Astyanax and her efforts to save him are well calculated to excite pity. Polixene shows nobility of character by her filial devotion and the support of her more unfortunate sister. These characters are the most convincing because their legendary traits remain unaltered. The dispute of their lovers only interests them as a means to self preservation and affects in no way the tragic condition to which they are reduced. Andromaque, her son slaughtered and her sister sacrificed, remains a mournful and pitiable remnant of Troy's greatness. With the two Greek heroes the case is somewhat different. Granted Pradon's contention that such headstrong, violent leaders might very well quarrel over the captive women, the sight of the heroes engaged in such gallant and rhetorical conflict over the possession of these women lessens our esteem for them. It does not follow that the society of Louis' court found any great inconsistency in this picture. The legendary figures were preserved; the amorous episode which made up the novelty of Pradon's treatment was not illogical and added interest to a well known subject. The inability of Pyrrhus and Ulysse to make an exchange of prisoners would not be too severely blamed, for the dramatist had to be allowed some fiction. If Pradon, then, is granted the basis of his exposition, it is easy to explain the public's interest in his play, because the novelty of seeing these heroes in love with their captives, Andromaque's sympathetic figure, the noble end of Polixène, and the manly conduct of Astyanax were absorbing sights upon the stage and the love episodes were not allowed to alter too much the well known characters. In this way the tragedy is far better than *Tamerlan* or *Phèdre et Hippolyte* and shows less pure « galanterie ». The love episodes are in better balanced relation to the other parts of the story, and the intricacy of plot, slightly more

complicated than in the earlier plays, is better managed.

The unpopularity of *Statira* is easily accounted for after a perusal of the involved « maze plot ». The appeal of the subject depended upon the favor of La Calprenède's novel. A tragedy based on this popular subject would certainly awaken public interest. Pradon owed much to the romance a considerable part of which went into his scenes. In spite of his statement in his preface that La Calprenède's material was not suitable for the stage, he was content to copy it, hoping, doubtless, to attract an audience by the choice of a subject so familiar to the general reader. His plot is most exasperating and wearisome, full of antitheses, surprises, involved situations, used now with one set of characters now with others, with always the same tricks of composition. The difficulty of getting a definite hold on the story, of finding one's way amid such varied motives must have been more tedious to the onlooker than it is to the reader. It is no wonder that the play fell into disuse after a few performances. The figure of Léonatus offers no novelty, since his qualities are those of Oroondate in the novel of *Cassandre*. The other characters are transplanted from La Calprenède with incidents from this work pieced together, and the dénouement is made to conform to stage usage, requiring a slight deviation from the novel. Why *Statira* kills herself is vague, unconvincing, and illogical. Evidently the author decided there must be some tragic end so he sacrificed her to this purpose.

A certain Cornelian conception runs through the play, but it is subordinated to the numerous love episodes which blight the whole construction. Roxane, the ambitious usurper, conceived on the model of Corneille's regal personages, might have been convincing had Pradon not spoiled her portrait by her varied love affairs. Perdiccas, too, the unscrupulous plotter, bid fair to maintain a character of force, well drawn and in proportion. He is, however, made largely ineffective by the same romanesque treatment. The author's attention



was so bent upon following the lines laid down by the novel that he never saw how unsuitable this conception was for the stage. A simpler plot and a better arrangement of the episodes might have made a more convincing play.

Three or four plots leading in opposite directions and each lacking sufficient interest to sustain attention make for confusion and boredom. The author thought he was combining skilfully a love story with political manœuvres — a type of tragedy in which Racine had been successful and which the stage of the day found profitable. Pradon, however, fell into the romanesque, a manner not uncommon to the novel and tragedy of the period. His rhetorical heroes and amorous women rivals, threatened executions, forced acceptance of unwilling mates, insurrections, defeats, pass in rapidly changing scenes filled with schemes of revenge, cold protests of love, or detailed analyses of the lover's feelings until the reader becomes so confused that he loses interest. As a novelty this play offers nothing to the already well known tale ; as a dramatic offering it fails to produce either pity or fear. It is flat, artificial, and unconvincing.

*Regulus*, whose success in Pradon's lifetime and in later years is well known, deserved of all his plays the most acclaim. Simple in construction, free from many of the annoying mannerisms of his early tragedies, it sustains interest by the noble figure of the hero. The author did well to reproduce in its main lines the history of the Cornelian hero whose tragic end evolved from the internal conflict of duty with personal feelings, aims, and desires. The love episode is here entirely subordinated to the story of Regulus pursuing his duty to the end. The attention of the onlooker is thus not distracted by any inept passion or drawn away from the main issue by a confusion of plot. The love of Regulus for Fulvie, though fiction of the usual Pradon sort, is acceptable because secondary. The language of Regulus is noble, free from bombast or the gallantry of the salons and the versification is better than usual. The scenes, logically arranged without useless



crowding one upon the other, serve sufficiently to present the milieu and sketch the minor incidents. The first three acts lead up to the great tragic crisis of the fourth in which Regulus makes his choice. Two subordinate themes run throughout the play, that of Fulvie and the jealousy of Mannius. They fill the first three acts, adding variety to a subject otherwise difficult to sustain at length upon the stage. By changing the milieu from Rome to the camp of Regulus, Pradon preserved the unity of place without affecting to any harmful degree the historical fact.

Fulvie's love, likewise a fiction, fits well into the action. The necessity for such an episode sprang from Pradon's conception of tragedy as an historical action joined to a sentimental situation, but most of his tragedies are spoiled by his tendency to falsify characters and complicate the plot. Such is not the case in *Regulus*. By keeping his weakness for such mannerisms in hand, he presented the Roman hero in the light of historical narrative. The love episode gave to the figure an added interest in the renunciation of his love for Fulvie. The effect is not displeasing and certainly added to the enjoyment of the audience whose sympathy went out to Fulvie while admiring the hero's greatness of soul. The boy Atillius was used to the same advantage. Regulus, called upon to renounce family ties and the woman he loves, does not enter into lone debates over the proper course to follow but moves straight to his fate, brushing aside all opposition in a manner worthy of admiration. This is Corneille's hero. It is a pity that Pradon did not follow his master's model sooner and put aside the sentimental and the amorous. He held too much to the popular taste, thinking to catch it by a mixture of the two systems. In *Regulus* he shows what he might have accomplished if he had followed his own inclinations and not the dictates of a temporary success.

Regulus moves through the tragedy with a nobility and constancy all of a piece. Solicitous for Fulvie, he does not fall into the inept in seeking to protect her :

On va bientôt donner un assaut à Carthage,  
Le tumulte, les cris, et l'horreur des combats,  
Ce mélange confus d'âmes et de soldats,  
Ce terrible appareil vous rendroit trop timide,  
Souffrez malgré l'amour que la gloire vous guide  
Madame, au nom des Dieux partez avec mon Fils <sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \*

Aux noms des Dieux, partez, éloignez-vous de nous,  
Le fort de Clypée sera plus seur pour vous :  
Retournez-y, Madame, et par l'ordre d'un père,  
Par les vœux d'un Romain à qui vous êtes chère  
Vos jours sont exposez dans un camp <sup>2</sup>.

At the great decision he is firm, although displaying great human sympathy which strengthens his figure as a noble and worthy Roman :

Il falloit servir Rome, et je la sers, Madame,  
Elle a dû l'emporter sur vous et sur ma flamme :  
Ne me regardez plus comme amant, comme époux,  
Un malheureux esclave est indigne de vous ;  
Aujourd'hui cependant envisagez ma gloire  
Esclave, je remporte une grande victoire,  
Et je mourray content en songeant que mes fers  
Pourront après Carthage enchaîner l'Univers.  
Mais, Madame, vos pleurs ébranlent ma constance,  
Je tâchois d'éviter vos yeux, vostre présence,  
Je sens que ma vertu dans le trouble où je suis  
Pourroit : — Sortons : mais Dieux ! l'on m'amène mon fils ;  
Voilà le dernier trait que me gardoit Lépide <sup>3</sup>.

After the pleading of his son, overcome with emotion, Regulus dismisses him with a few short phrases :

Mon fils, rassurez-vous, soyez digne de moy,  
Faites-moy voir un cœur incapable d'efroy.  
Sans vous acoutumer à répandre des larmes  
Dissipez devant moy ces indignes allarmes.  
Respectez Metellus. Puissent les destinées  
Vous accorder, mon fils, de plus longues années

1. Act. II, sc. II.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Act. V, sc. V.

Où s'il les doit finir par quelque coup du sort,  
Qu'il prenne pour modèle et ma vie et ma mort <sup>1</sup>.

His farewell to Fulvie shows the same lofty spirit :

Il est temps de marquer la grandeur de vostre âme :  
Armez-vous de vertu, sans plaindre Regulus,  
Montrez-vous aujourd'hui fille de Metellus,  
Imitez sa constance, et si je perds la vie,  
Songez qu'il me regarde avec des yeux d'envie <sup>2</sup>.

The character of Fulvie is conceived in a more worthy manner than most of Pradon's feminine rôles. With the exception of Amestris in *Pirame* none of them have great force of character. This daughter of Metellus presents a truly Roman steadfastness of purpose and lofty ideals : « Elle a des sentimens assez dignes d'une Romaine pour ne pas faire rougir Regulus du dessin qu'il a de l'épouser après la prise de Carthage ». The author thus sketches her in his preface. In execution he has succeeded in giving to her the desired qualities. She is calm in the face of danger, refusing to withdraw from the field of battle when her father and lover, whom she has come to watch over, order her away :

Seigneur, si vous m'aimez, épargnez-moy des larmes,  
.....  
Ce n'est point par des vœux qu'il faut vous secourir,  
Je dois près de vous vivre, ou près de vous mourir <sup>3</sup>.

She scorns the attentions of Mannius, suspicious of him and despising his craven fear :

Lasche, pour te punir d'une telle insolence  
Les plus sanglans mépris serviront ma vengeance.  
Quand tu vois Regulus des Dieux abandonné,  
Aux fers des Africains ce Héros enchaîné ;  
Perfide, tu prétens en tirer avantage,  
Quand pour luy la fortune a changé de visage,

1. Act. V, sc. v.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Act. II, sc. iv.



Sa disgrâce affermit mes sermens et ma foy,  
Et redouble aujourd'huy l'horreur que j'ay pour toy <sup>1</sup>.

When confronted with the decision of Regulus to return to captivity and death leaving behind him love and renown, she meets the situation with the fortitude of a true daughter of her country.

The characters of Metellus and Mannius are more or less conventional figures. Metellus is the whole-hearted, fervent, staunch pro-consul, supporting his chief and Rome with all the ardor of his stern, military nature; Mannius, a different sort of creature, has the qualities of the cowardly traitor, weak-willed, ambitious, jealous to the point of selling his honor to gain his ends. His activity in the play serves to bring about the betrayal of Regulus. As a motive for this deed he is assigned the role of rival in love to the great Roman. Pradon has well described his effrontery before the victim of his treachery and his silent reception of Regulus's wrath :

REGULUS

Mannius, soyez un peu moins fier,  
Il seroit dangereux de vous justifier ;  
C'est vous... quoiqu'il en soit, allez, je vous pardonne,  
A vos propres remords mon cœur vous abandonne.

MANNIUS

Moy, Seigneur ? je pourrais...

REGULUS

Né me répondez plus,  
Allez, et qu'on me laisse avec Metellus <sup>2</sup>.

The tragedy could not fail to please. Its simplicity compared with the author's previous involved plays was doubtless a surprise to his public. The figure of Regulus, touching and

1. Act. III, sc. v.

2. Act. IV, sc. III

noble, was admirable in the manly firmness with which the hero pursues his own aim, recalling, as it did, the great heroes of Corneille, who likewise sacrificed love and family ties for honor or duty. The verbose, rhetorical phrases have disappeared ; the emotional scenes are more convincing ; stress of feeling and tense situations are not given in long tirades ; and short, abrupt sentences leave room for a play of the imagination. The lines assigned to Regulus are replete with political maxims *à la Corneille*. The touching love scene wherein Fulvie plays a role similar to the hero's in renunciation would delight those who desired to see a moving passion expressed by a great historical figure. The subordination of this secondary plot made Regulus stand out in clearer fashion, and sympathy for the heroine accompanied admiration for Regulus. Far nobler was it that the villainous Mannius should be conquered by the scorn of his victim than by a conventional death at the hands of his rival. The plot develops without intricacy straight to the expected conclusion, and the versification is better than Pradon's usual style. It is not surprising, then, that the tragedy held the stage far into the succeeding century. In construction, character drawing, and freedom from the baneful influence of a « fade » gallantry, it was quite above many contemporary plays whose authors were not called upon to win the public's approval against the ridicule and slander of powerful enemies.

*Scipion l'Africain* might well be called the tragedy of the « confidants », for the stage is given over to their expository remarks, their careless news carrying, and their gratuitous advice. Not even *Phèdre et Hippolyte* is as poor a tragedy as this foolish tragi-comedy, whose versification is the worst of all Pradon's plays, showing evidence of hasty composition. Probably old age was lessening what small ability he possessed as a poet and story teller. Otherwise, the appearance of this play after *Regulus* is hard to account for. As in the early play the author chose a well known political

figure, in fact two, Scipion and Hannibal. Instead of conceiving his plot after the Cornelian type followed in his *Regulus*, he seems to have learned no lesson from his previous success. An insipid love story reduces the powerful Scipion to the rank of a foolish swain whom Hannibal offers to reward by a woman's favor. Scipion, master of the world, cannot even master his own heart. Hannibal ends his debate over the fate of nations by gossiping about the love of his sister for a headstrong, undisciplined mercenary. Ispérie floats through the tragedy, pale, insipid, and as inactive as Thisbé in Pradon's first play.

The presence of Erixène is inexplicable. Her part in the tragedy is hard to find unless it be to fill a counter role to that of Ispérie. She appears to love Scipion, but even that feeling is not sufficiently expressed, and, in fact, the most unimportant « confident » speaks more to the point than she. Lucejus, the wayward prince of the Celtiberians, gains admittance to Scipion's camp in an ill-explained manner and shows his amorous feelings by the usual display of Pradon's cold rhetoric. First doubtful of Ispérie's love, then fully reassured, he dashes off to lead an attack at the very moment when his commander is holding parley with the enemy. He is made prisoner, and Scipion, confronted with the problem of sacrificing his rival and losing Ispérie's love or of abandoning his love for her, becomes magnanimous, like Tamerlan before him, presents her to Lucejus, then continues to follow his ambition.

The important interview between the rival chieftains is so marred by the pernicious sentimentalizing of Scipion and the mediocre strategy of Hannibal that the great historical personages present a poor figure. This inconsistency must have displeased the public who hoped to see in this encounter lofty ambition, the proud unbending qualities of the conquerors, inspiring verses replete with political maxims, grandiose phrases, and moving sentiments. Instead of that they were presented with a semi-political debate in which the destiny



of Rome and Carthage was bartered for a woman's love in this fashion :

HANNIBAL

Vous serez plus pour elle [Rome] en accordant la paix,  
La victoire toujours ne suit pas nos souhaits  
De plus, considérez qu'en l'état où nous sommes,  
Je me vois à la tête encore de cent mille hommes,  
Que je fais avancer et camper à vos yeux.  
Nous combatrons, le reste est en la main des Dieux,  
Elle saura régler votre sort et le nostre,  
Mais songez que la paix est encor en la nostre,  
J'ay négligé, Seigneur, de vous parler d'abord  
D'un bien qui pourroit cimenter un accord ;  
Jusqu'icy vous n'avez aucun nœud qui nous lie ;  
Si ma Nièce, Seigneur, si l'heureuse Ispérie  
A ce suprême honneur méritoit d'aspirer  
Mais le cœur d'un Romain ne sait pas soupirer,  
Et le vostre trop fier et trop inexorable...

SCIPION

Je respecte Ispérie, elle est toute adorable,  
Elle pourroit fléchir le plus superbe cœur  
Mais pour la mériter il faut être vainqueur,  
Et ce seroit pour moy le comble de la gloire  
Que l'hymen d'Ispérie après une victoire  
Je ne m'en défens point j'adore ses vertus,  
Cependant vous l'avez promise à Lucéjus,  
Et vostre foy, Seigneur...

HANNIBAL

Cette promesse est vaine  
Ce lien est rompu par sa nouvelle chaîne <sup>1</sup>.

With Ispérie Scipion is both tender and overbearing, now playing the role of gentle knight, now that of proud conqueror with somewhat the tone of a pleading lover :

SCIPION

Ma présence vous gêne  
Et je seray toujours l'objet de vostre haine,  
Je la mérite peu cependant <sup>2</sup>.

1. Act. III, sc. iv.

2. Act. II, sc. iv.

Madame, vous croyez la haine légitime,  
La prise de Zama vous a coûté des pleurs,  
Du Prince vostre Amant, j'ay causé les malheurs  
Et vous vous en plaignez du moins sans vous contraindre  
C'est d'autres malheurs dont on n'ose se plaindre <sup>1</sup>.

Ouy, pour vous Rome a d'autres desseins,  
Et puisqu'il est enfin ennemy des Romains  
Cet Amant, qu'il combat contre la République  
Tout s'oppose à ses vœux, raison et politique,  
Pourrait-elle souffrir qu'il devint vostre époux ?  
Et d'ailleurs cet hymen est-il digne de vous ? <sup>2</sup>

Et fut-il Roy, Madame,  
Il ne mérite point une si belle flamme ?  
Que vous connoissez peu le prix de vostre cœur ?  
Vous ignorez encor jusqu'à quel point d'honneur —  
Non, à vostre mérite il n'est rien qui réponde  
Il est trop au-dessus de tous les Roys du monde,  
Et pour mieux contenir l'honneur de vostre choix,  
Il faut un des vainqueurs, un des maîtres des Rois,  
En un mot, un Romain <sup>3</sup>.

The same tricks of composition which appeared in the earlier plays again occur. Amorous and sentimental qualities spoil the chief characters. It seems as if Pradon gave his favorite method free rein which in earlier works he had kept somewhat in bounds, not allowing it to deface the plot by its persistent, falsifying tendency. In *Scipion l'Africain* the subject, great in possibilities, was completely spoiled and reduced to the romanesque. Characters are distorted, history made to do duty to romance, and tragedy turned tragi-comic. Unable to dispose of Ispérie to his satisfaction or to extricate his vacillating Scipion from an « impasse », Pradon found recourse in the gallant renunciation of his hero. Ispérie is saved, the lovers gain their freedom, and Scipion follows his destiny. Pradon's mistake was in presuming that the tragedy of a broken heart in whatever setting he chose was sufficient to

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

move an audience. He never before pushed this idea to the extent of making it the dominant force. However much his public relished amorous scenes and heroes, they were not ready to abandon all other pleasurable elements in tragedy for this method. The play's ill-success is witness to this fact.

A study of the exposition in these tragedies reveals in all but two, *Phèdre et Hippolyte* and *Regulus*, a similarity of treatment. The action progresses in the later works in much the same manner as it does in *Pirame et Thisbé* which became for Pradon, it seems, a guiding rule in dramatic construction. The opening scene of every first act states the political plot with the necessary information for understanding the relation of the principal characters to it, usually given in a dialogue between a secondary figure and a confidant. Toward the end of this scene appears the sentimental or love plot which later will fuse with and dominate the political situation. The first act thus points to a struggle of love against jealousy, political ambition, or lust for possession. The character who gives the name to the tragedy does not appear during this act, but, with the exception of the two tragedies mentioned above, opens the second act with an analysis of his or her feelings of love. The beginnings of a rival plot stand out. The heroine is in a quandary which side to choose, for in most cases it is a feminine role that opens this act. Her soul-debates are interrupted by the arrival of her lover with his qualms of conscience. Further debates, uncertainties, analytic reasoning ensue until the pair finally decide upon fidelity to each other, which puts them squarely opposed to the political plot with its jealousies and violence. Here the act ends and the audience is carried in suspense to the next episode. In the tragedies in which a masculine role leads, the method is the same with a substitution of the hero for the heroine at the opening of the second act.

In Act III the political plot, which up to this point has lagged, moves forward until the opposing forces are confront-



ed and the success of the lovers in holding to their aim is momentarily jeopardized by having to choose between defeat or surrender to the demands of the stronger political characters. Hero and beloved are thrown into confusion, one suspecting the other of weakness or infidelity and the heroine always refusing to believe her lover true to her. This act like the preceding ends in suspense and doubt as to the outcome of the unequal struggle. The lovers are reunited in the fourth act; they swear fidelity again and plan what end shall be theirs in defeat, thus suggesting the dénouement. The attention of the audience is directed to the conclusion which the dramatist will now start to unfold.

The political plot reaches its solution at the beginning of the fifth act, bringing about the downfall of the lovers and the dénouement: death to either hero or heroine and remorse to the guilty. Two plays, *Tamerlan* and *Scipion*, do not have that sort of dénouement. Their end comes from a sudden change of heart by the political oppressor, causing him to spare his rival's life and that of the heroine. In *Tamerlan* it is true that this change arises from Bajazet's death. Pradon was evidently of Corneille's opinion that tragedy might have a happy or an unhappy ending provided the subject matter treated a lofty theme in a serious manner.

In spite of certain deviations this method of exposition is quite constant throughout the tragedies. Technical expediency or the requirements of particular scenes cause a slight change here and there in the manner of presentation but in the main Pradon is consistent. For dramatic movement and for sustaining suspense the method is good but its continual use gives to the tragedies a similarity and conformity that is monotonous.

*Phèdre et Hippolyte* does not follow this method nor is the disposition of the characters in the scenes similar. *Phèdre* appears in the first act as she does in Racine's tragedy. In fact the whole conception and arrangement of Pradon's play lead one to suppose that he copied from his rival, although

his usual manner is apparent in Act I, scene 1, where Hippolyte's love story is introduced at the end by means of the customary dialogue. The political plot is replaced by the vengeance of the gods working apparently through Phèdre. In Act III the opposing forces meet and the plot against Hippolyte comes to a head. Except for these resemblances the arrangement is not in Pradon's usual manner.

With *Regulus* the similarity is even less. We are introduced in the first act to the political events and Mannius's love for Fulvie, but Regulus, unlike other heroes of this dramatist, considers his duty to be above his passions. This leaves the love story to the secondary role of the jealous tribune. In his preface Pradon justifies this by saying : « J'avoue qu'il y a peu d'amour, mais je n'y en pouvois mettre davantage avec bien-séance », which recalls Corneille's opinion in his *Discours du Poème dramatique* that love must have a secondary place in tragedy. Such simplicity of plot as *Regulus* presents is uncommon with Pradon. He was apparently aware of this, for he took occasion in his preface to remark : « Mesme les plus fins connoisseurs m'ont applaudy d'avoir pu faire cinq actes complets d'un sujet aussi simple qu'est celui-cy ». In this he was merely replying to Racine's second preface to *Bérénice* : « Il y en a qui pensent que cette simplicité est une marque de peu d'invention. Ils ne songent pas qu'au contraire toute l'invention consiste à faire quelque chose de rien, et que tout ce grand nombre d'incidents a toujours été le refuge des poètes qui ne sentaient dans leur génie ni assez d'abondance ni assez de force pour attacher durant cinq actes leurs spectateurs par une action simple, soutenue de la violence des passions, de la beauté des sentiments, et de l'élégance de l'expression ».

The principal theme of all these tragedies except *Regulus* is love struggling against a rival love passion which is aided by political power, ambition, or jealous egotism. Pradon seems to believe that true and faithful love is the greatest virtue, that it conquers the heartless, cynical, and criminal,



although often having death for its reward, and that even the proudest monarchs, Tamerlan and Scipion, bend before its power. In *Regulus*, however, he places duty and personal honor above mere sexual love. Renunciation here becomes the driving force in Fulvie as well as in Regulus.

The dramatic dialogue with its political questions or soul-stirring debates between the lovers is the usual method of presentation in the scenes. The monologue is infrequent and when used serves to carry the suspense from one act to another by the despair or doubt of some leading character. Scenes move along by sudden starts, changes of purpose, uncertainties, arguments over the emotion of love more rhetorical than psychological; an escape from a situation is vainly sought, but indecision inhibits action. A struggle against rivals such as that absorbing the attention of Pirame, Andronic, Statira, Pyrrhus and Scipion, or an effort to escape the tyranny of an idea as in *Regulus* causes frequent shifting of ground and gives to the scenes a certain nervous movement resembling action. An excess of vacillation, such as we find in *La Troade* and *Statira*, is annoying and unpleasant, often leaving the impression of a lack of unity in the plot.

Pradon did, however, hold to the classic unities of time and place. Occasionally the unity of time is strained to accomodate rapidly changing events of political significance. The tendency to move from simplicity of plot to the tragedy of varied intrigue, so characteristic of Pradon's work up to *Regulus*, endangers the unity of time. Although the first tragedy, *Pirame et Thisbé*, was not simple in plot, the numerous episodes so harmful to *Statira* were not in evidence. In the latter play the unity of time is somewhat strained by the capture of Léonatus, the two interviews of the lovers, Léonatus's second capture by Perdicas and that of Statira by Casander with Perdicas's revolt, all of which fill to excess the time allotted a classic tragedy. This fault probably arises from the fact that Pradon followed La Calprenède's novel which was written in the unity of time. In *La Troade* and *Scipion* there



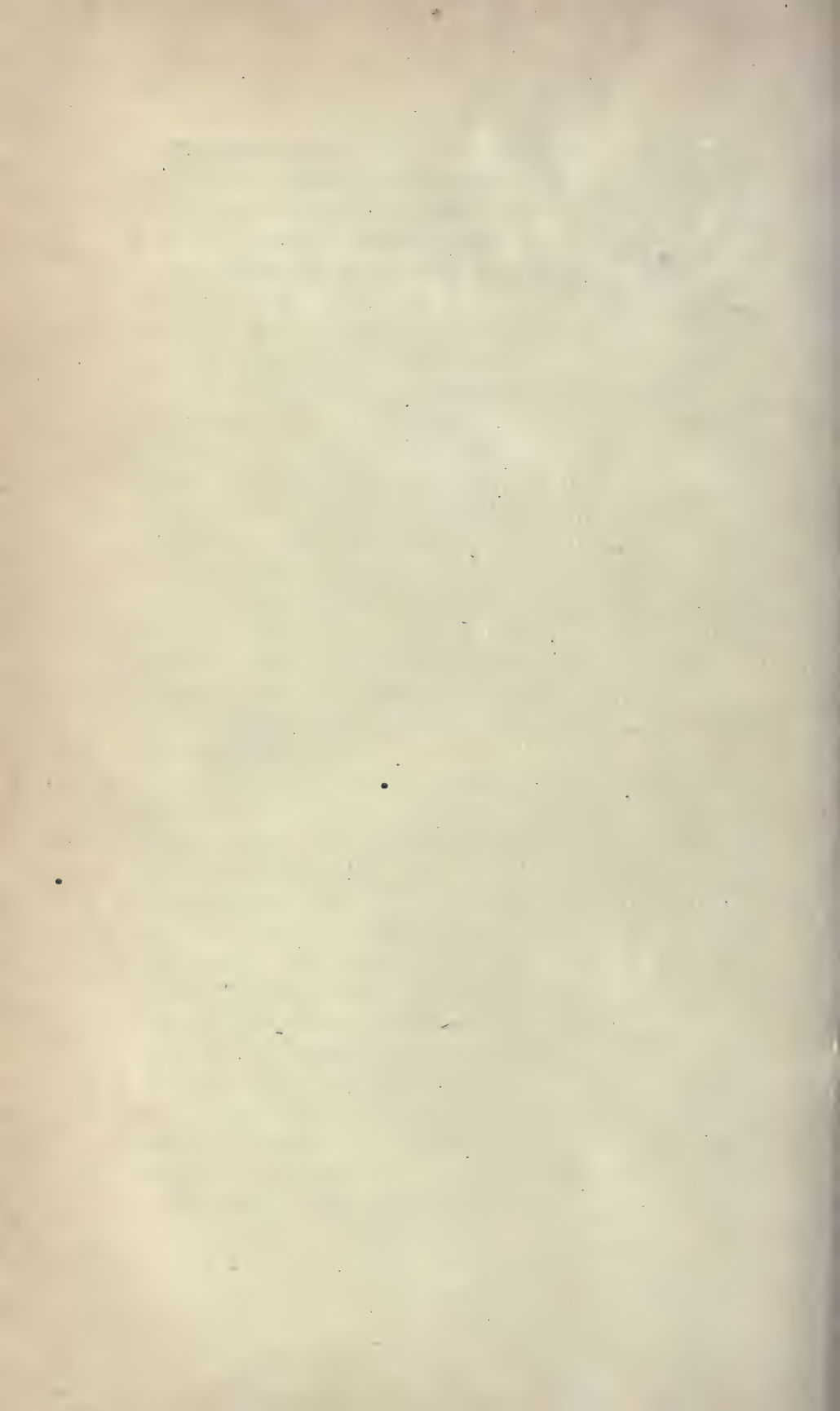
is a considerable strain upon « vrai-semblance ». The former, from the capture of Astyanax to his death, contains too many interviews and plots to save the Trojan women. *Scipion* offends still more by the inclusion within its brief space of a meeting between the world rivals, the attack of the over-zealous Lucejus, and the battle of Zama. *Phèdre* and *Regulus* are more in accordance with the time unity.

The unity of action must be considered in relation to Pradon's method of composition, in which an involved love plot has attached to it a political story offering a counter-plot of jealous love. The two are woven together into a complex whole which makes for unity. Each element contributes in its way so that the diverse strands are all, as it were, on the same plane, none secondary but each working toward the dénouement. Hasty composition, the crowding of incident upon incident, and the constant effort to carry on the political plot with the love plot suggest at first reading a lack of unity. Upon closer study a loose unity is apparent but spoiled at times by such ill-directed and meaningless episodes as Cassander's love in *Statira* and the figure of Eryxène in *Scipion*.

The principal characters are all noble, either rulers or leaders of men. Death occurs in all cases, *Tamerlan* excepted, off the stage. Although *Bajazet* does die from poison in sight of the audience, there is no offence against French classic precept which allowed suicide upon the stage. All scenes of violence, battles, uprisings, are transacted behind the scenes. The language is gallant, courtly, mannered, with occasional conceits but far less of them than one would expect from a favorite of the salons where préciosité still found favor. Padded lines, conventional rhymes, a monotonous and limited vocabulary, antithetical and swelling phrases are the main characteristics of Pradon's poetic style. Maxims abound and subtleties of love and debate add to the wordiness of the dialogue. Passion is usually expressed in a manner voluble, coldly rhetorical, and tedious. The tragédies are

indeed better in construction than they are in their poetry. The scenes move along with sufficient rapidity to hold the attention when the poetry of the lines does not weary. In motivation the acts are good, although too many details often crowd upon an intricate plot and an excess of rhetoric tends to confuse.

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## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION.

Was Pradon the stupid author whose works were so badly conceived, so lacking in dramatic and poetic skill that the public would have none of them ? The preceding pages, it is hoped, have in a measure softened the harshness of denunciations, given praise where possible and blame for the all too numerous errors of judgment and taste which Boileau has pointed out. To judge Pradon in the light of present day criticism would be of little value to the history of French letters in which he plays a very slight and mediocre rôle. He has appeared worthy of study, however, as a type of the lesser writer of his age who persistently and against a considerable opposition held to his trade, producing one play after another with little difference in manner, reaping slight benefit and less renown for his trouble. As a specimen of the seventeenth century dramatist he presents an interesting problem. His plays were produced, some with success judging by their ability to hold the stage. In those days numerous performances of a single tragedy covering a sequence of many days were rare. Pradon's plays, at least some of them, did have a favorable reception. This curious fact, in the light of their author's reputation, lead to the study of the tragedies themselves and to the man Pradon. To fix him in his milieu and then to observe his relation to the society of his time as a basis for a new judgment upon the man and his work has been the aim of this study. Interest in this endeavor was increased

by finding occasionally some bit of favorable comment upon this strangely vague figure in the critical writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The obscurity surrounding his early life and in fact most of his career has made it necessary to build the figure, as it were, from a skeleton of uncertain data, to clothe it with the garments of its particular social world, and by means of Pradon's written remarks give it a being and a character independent of the critics. A study of the man and his works from the point of view of his time was desirable ; an evaluation resting not upon any preconceived notions, biased judgment, or hostility, but upon the author himself in connection with the age for which he wrote.

With this aim in view it is hoped that Pradon stands a clearer figure than heretofore. To excuse the man and condemn his works is illogical. To interpret both in the light of his time seems fairer and possibly nearer the truth. That he was not a great writer is self-evident, but to deny him all literary instinct, to call him stupid is as bad as over-praise. Such an attitude, the traditional one in his case, has made the study of his life more difficult. Biographers had mistaken the date of his birth, assigned to him a name not his, advanced the date of his Parisian activities, and, upon the faith of Boileau, had disregarded in many instances his slight success without asking themselves the reason for the favor accorded him or looking beyond the condemnation of his enemies.

Pradon was no poet in the true sense of the word. This was his greatest fault. Boileau was quite justified in scoffing at his flat, uninspired rhymes, his mannered, stilted verses often false in sentiment and construction. Compared with the great poets of his age he is inadequate, a lay figure of little worth. A Norman by birth, of an honorable and cultured family whose devotion to poetry is attested, he became early engaged in a literary career, either by inclination or from a desire to follow the lead of his compatriots. Coming to Paris with the first product of his dramatic ability,

following the footsteps of Corneille in manner and method, he attached himself to the salon society of Corneille's admirers. He became their mouthpiece and followed the dictates of their taste. A lover of good society, of the ease and comfort of its protection, he went from one powerful protector to another, seeking favors, and rewards suitable for maintaining himself among the polite and well-born. The vicarious career of a dramatist forced him, as it did others, to adopt this procedure. For such assistance he was willing to sacrifice himself, to blacken his name by a stupid rivalry with the great Racine. Boileau made him pay for this effrontery and Pradon felt only too well the effects of his mistake. Undaunted by ridicule, to which he replied none too skillfully, — he was not clever or witty enough to be an able critic — he continued in his chosen field. His literary creed was that of the popular writer — to please by whatever manner was most effective. An admirer of Corneille, he adopted his mannerisms ; he changed them when they were somewhat out of fashion for the more sentimental « *douceur* » of a new style.

He compromised with his old principles and tried to combine two methods without understanding just what incongruities would result. He knew and recognized only what the public liked. With his ear to the ground he listened for the new and significant note, trying to capture it, to enlarge upon it to please his audiences. He is commonplace because he represents the common popular taste of the times ; not the best, most enlightened, or cultured, but the taste of a great mass of the society called *honnêtes gens*, made up of carefree nobles, intriguing women, pushing bourgeois, truculent cavaliers, sober lawyers, and minor statesmen, affected poets, mannered, sentimental novelists, in short, all the society of the court and the city for whom Molière wrote his ballets, Quinault his operas, and Fontenelle his verses. Pradon was not the only writer of occasion. The history of the stage of this period is full of just such characters, but they remain merely names. Their works lie forlorn and forgotten.



When the great quarrel between the old and the new school broke out, Pradon, like all the writers of the moment whose living and social existence depended upon present favor, joined force with the popular party, sided with the Moderns, and voted with the crowd. When menaced in their opinions, all this body of lesser lights banded together for self-protection. Once the danger was removed, they drew apart, each seeking his own advantage, jealous of his rival, petty, malicious, envious, and desirous of royal favor. Pradon appears strangely free from many of these faults. He attacked only to defend himself. Envy and jealousy do not control his utterances, but rather a frankness in statement of likes and preferences which makes it easier to get at his literary views.

Such was the man Pradon as he moved through this oligarchy of social caste over which presided the « Roi Soleil ». Like all aristocratic bodies this society, too, had its higher and lower strata, its gradations in excellence. The greater and the lesser minds, the more cultured and the less well informed had their circle of influence. In the more refined the numbers were smaller. There remained the crowd of *honnêtes gens* whose tastes and pleasures were not quite those of a La Rochefoucauld, of a Madame de Sévigné, a Racine, or a Boileau. For this inferior circle Pradon wrote. It was in just such tragedies as he conceived, not always successfully, that this larger society is reflected with all its short-comings in taste and literary ideas. The great classic writers represent for us the best of their age, the refinement, the elegance of the élite, but even in this restricted court life the less endowed members are lost to view if our gaze is constantly fixed upon the great figures of the period. Underlying this excellent taste was that of people of average culture, typically conventional, who perhaps represent a side of the « Siècle de Louis XIV » likely to be overlooked. An attempt to understand this side of the picture can be the only justification for a study of Pradon.

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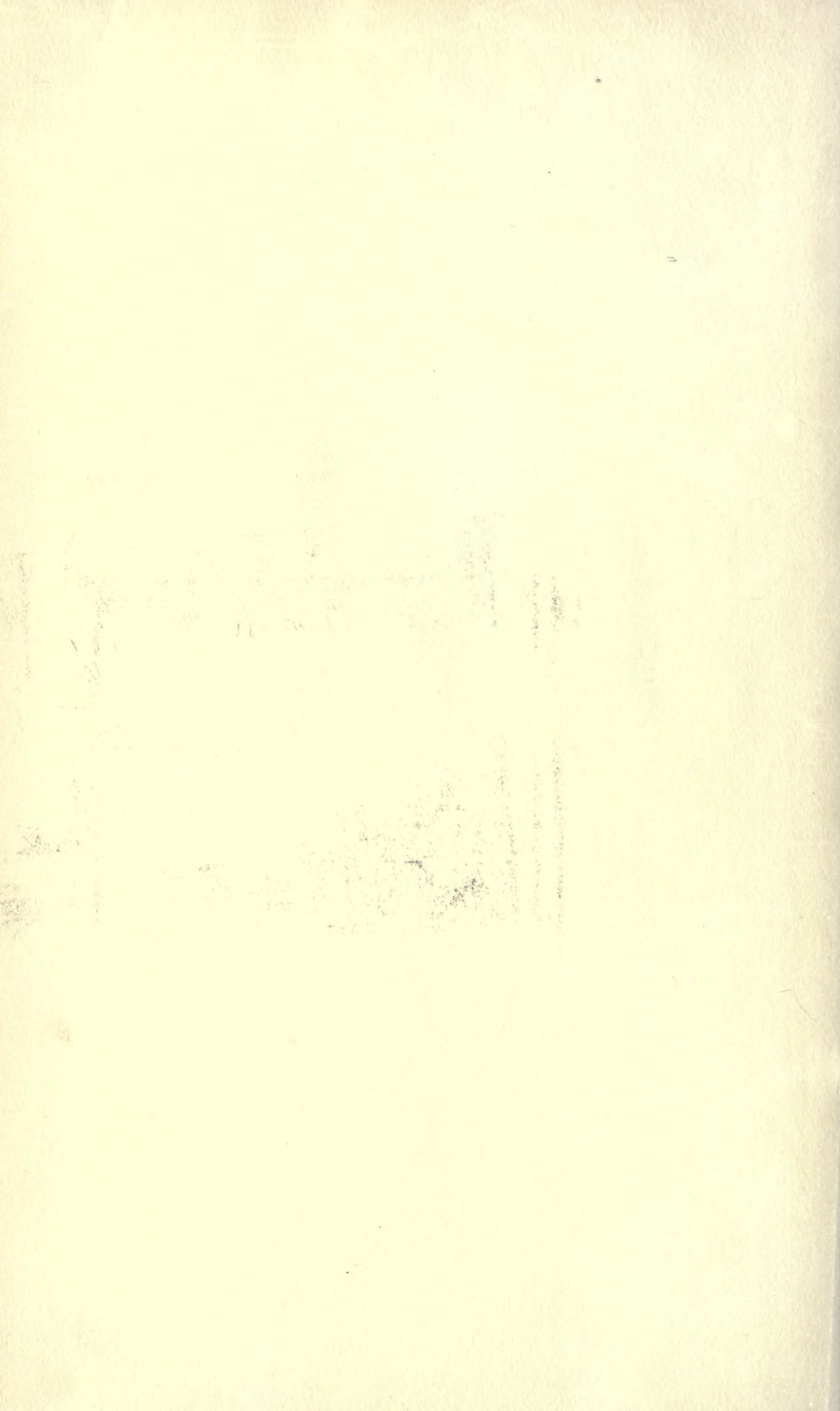
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